

Teacher support materials to use



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Brief Plot Summary

Neighbors. In the 1980s in El Salvador, the struggle for power between the government's army and the Guerillas, causes widespread damage and death. A peasant couple, Ramón and Pilar, see their neighbor being taken away, his wife killed, and his house burned. Ramón becomes involved in a protest and is marked for death. He tries to escape to the U.S. but is returned to El Salvador and discovers that his village was destroyed and his family gone. He again crosses the US border and is rescued from death in the desert by two nuns. He is given sanctuary by a couple in Texas. While there, he learns that his family is safe. Together again, they move to Maryland where they work in a restaurant. After several years they work to help others gain protected status and sanctuary in the U.S.

Think about it

Neighbors Discussion Questions

Chapter 1: Ramón and Pilar

1. What is a civil war?
2. Why do you think the Archbishop's words got him murdered?
3. Is it possible to be both poor and happy?
4. What did "disappeared" mean in El Salvador at the time of this story?

Chapter 2: Felipe

1. What is El Cadejo? What does it mean? Why do people believe in such things? What does it mean to say something is not real but is real?
2. Who are "the wrong people"?
3. Why do Ramón and Pilar not feel safe?

Chapter 3: The Land

1. How do you make a decision when all the choices seem bad?
2. Is having your picture taken without your permission legal?
3. What are the most basic rights that every person should have?

Chapter 4: An Old Neighbor

1. How did the Salvadoran army use Ramón's photograph against him?
2. Were the soldiers going to kill him?
3. Would you leave your family behind??

Chapter 5: Leaving the Country

1. Look at a map of North America. How far is El Salvador from the United States border?
2. What does it mean to make "the sign of the cross"?
3. Did Ramón really have to leave El Salvador?

Chapter 6: Back Again

1. Why do people pay coyotes to smuggle them into a country?
2. What do you think happened to Pilar and the children?
3. What does it mean to be "on their own"?

Chapter 7: Two Nuns

1. How can you survive in a desert?
2. Why do the nuns help illegal people?
3. If the black cadejo represents evil, what does the white cadejo represent?
How do different cultures represent good and evil?

Chapter 8: Barney and Sarah

1. What are some meanings of the word “sanctuary”?
2. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This is known as “the Golden Rule.
3. Why do people like the nuns and the Fullers break the law?
4. What does it mean to live “underground”?

Chapter 9: Pilar’s Story

1. Why do you think it took so long to find Pilar? If the same thing happened today, how could the Internet make it easier?
2. What does it mean to “post bond”?
3. In what ways do people help newcomers to a country?

Chapter 10: Cristina and Carlos

1. Why do immigrants sometimes live in the same area as other people from the same country?
2. Citizen, non-citizen, legal, illegal, Temporary Protected Status, asylum: What are all these different immigration statuses?
3. How and why did Ramón and Pilar live “like Americans?”
4. Why did the Samoyas help a new immigrant?

Chapter 11: Valleria and Vittorio

1. Why do teens like Valeria and Vittorio join gangs?
2. Why is MS-13 so dangerous?
3. What does Valeria mean when she says “I am home now.”

Chapter 12: The TPS Years

1. Does TPS exist now?
2. Why do many Salvadorans consider the United States their home?
3. Why would the end of TPS be a problem for many families?

Chapter 13: Going to Washington

1. Family separation was a major immigration issue in 2018. Does it exist now?
2. The courts put an end to it; however, many families remained separated. How could this happen?
3. The Samoyas told their story? As a member of the government, would you be sympathetic?

Chapter 14 : José and Gabriela

1. Was José foolish to try to enter the U.S.?
2. Why were José and Gabriela separated?
3. If you were José, would you hire a coyote as Ramón did?

Chapter 15: The Festival

1. What is a festival? What is the purpose of festivals? What kinds of festivals have you attended? What were they like?
2. Why did Ramón tell the crowd about Archbishop Oscar Romero becoming a saint?
3. Why did Ramón see the white cadejo?

Neighbors

Historical Photos for Discussion

There are a great many wonderful photos that show aspects of the long, tragic story of the civil war in El Salvador. We have selected a few great sources for images and information.

A long but interesting one is https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salvadoran_Civil_War. Another is <https://www.rescue.org/country/el-salvador>. Hundreds of other images can be found on Google Images under Salvadoran Civil War. Pinterest offers hundreds of great photos which teachers can use in class: <https://www.pinterest.com/marvinmiller33/el-salvadorian-civil-war/?lp=true>. What we offer here are a few photos, some of which are clearly in the public domain and for some of which we have purchased the copyright – as indicated with the photos.

Neighbors begins with the assassination of Roman Catholic Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980 and ends with his sainthood. There are hundreds of photos and paintings of the Archbishop. The best, like this one chosen by Wikipedia as being iconic, have been copied so often over the years that they are in the public domain.



Since 1980, thousands of news photos have been taken of the civil war and the devastation caused by the fighting. In 1982, soon after our story begins, this image of neighbors bringing home the body of some poor farmer was taken by Gary Mark Smith and titled "A casualty of the Salvadoran Civil War is carried back to his farm for burial." The source is www.streetphoto.com, and it is clearly free to be used.



From PRI's The World, August 20, 2014 · 3:00 PM EDT. "A couple from El Salvador walk with their three-year old son on the train tracks in Saltillo, August 4, 2014. The young family plan to catch the cargo train, nicknamed La Bestia (The Beast), to the US. Credit: REUTERS/© Daniel Becerril.

Year after year refugees have come north from Central America through Mexico to ask for asylum at the U.S./Mexican border. It is marked by the fence or wall.



U.S./Mexico border at Sesabe, Arizona © Nicole Duperre/Dreamstime.com ID 66223635

Sometimes they turn themselves in to the Border Patrol. Sometimes they are caught coming in illegally. In the desert, people leave water and food for them. The photos below, © by CNS/ Peter Tran, Global Sisters, show members of the Tucson Samaritans counting used water containers and replacing them with full ones for migrants trying to cross the border in the Sonoran Desert northeast of Ajo, Arizona. The humanitarian aid organization was founded in 2002 as a mission of Southside Presbyterian Church to prevent death and suffering along the U.S.-Mexico border. Its volunteers drop off food and water in various locations in the desert.



These men have turned themselves in as refugees seeking asylum or been captured, and in this April, 2018, photo they are awaiting deportation back to El Salvador. The photo is © Edgardo Ayala from Spare Change News.



In *Neighbors*, Pilar names her restaurant Pupusa after her most popular Salvadoran dish. There are many photos of pupusas on the web, particularly at the Pupusas site on Wikimedia Commons:



Salvadorans who have settled in North America (the U.S. and Canada) enjoy traditional Salvadoran fiestas like the one at the end of the novel. Here are some photos © by Lostafichuk of Salvadoran women in traditional dress at the Edmonton Alberta Heritage Days Celebration on August 11, 2019, and others of dancers © by Kobby Dagan at the traditional Flower & Palm Festival in Panchimalco, El Salvador, on May 08, 2016.



Tana Reiff suggests these sites for more photos and information:

Salvadoran civil war:

<https://www.pinterest.com/marvinmiller33/el-salvadorian-civil-war/?lp=true>

Man carrying protest sign: "I'm here for our dream"

<https://www.newsday.com/long-island/salvadoran-ice-immigration-1.15671594>

Protest with signs outside White House:

<https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/politics/decision-to-end-protected-status-for-salvadorans-expected-to-affect-montgomery-county-immigrants/>

<https://www.voanews.com/a/immigrants-lawsuit-us-temporary-protected-status/4296058.html>

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/homeland-security-weighs-ending-protections-for-salvadoran-immigrants>

A refugee family from El Salvador waits at a bus stop after being released from a detention center. <https://www.kcet.org/shows/departures/central-american-migration>

Couple from El Salvador who hopped a train:

<https://www.pri.org/stories/2014-08-18/these-salvadorian-parents-detail-their-sons-harrowing-journey-meet-them-us>

Replacing water for illegal immigrants in the Arizona desert:

<https://www.vermontcatholic.org/nation/simple-act-of-providing-jugs-of-water-in-desert-prevents-migrant-deaths/>

<https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-usa/2018/07/22/simple-act-of-providing-jugs-of-water-in-desert-prevents-migrant-deaths/> (Catholic Relief Services or other Catholic group might have more photos)

There are, of course, many upsetting photos that teachers will only use with discretion.

Various harrowing scenes:

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/menaced-by-gangs-el-salvadors-children-are-running-for-their-lives/article26151568/>

Walking across Rio Grande:

<https://www.wnd.com/2014/08/kids-forced-to-swim-rio-grande-as-diversion/>

MS-13 (this is some scary stuff):

http://www.metalstorm.net/forum/topic.php?topic_id=29598

<https://f3img.gq/865?u=http%3a%2f%2fww4.hdnux.com%2fphotos%2f41%2f17%2f34%2f8714039%2f5%2f920x920.jpg=29598>

<https://f3img.gq/865?u=http%3a%2f%2fww4.hdnux.com%2fphotos%2f41%2f17%2f34%2f8714039%2f5%2f920x920.jpg>

Neighbors

Detailed Plot Summary

During a mass in San Salvador in 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero is murdered after asking the Salvadoran army and the police to stop the civil war. The news spreads throughout the country. Ramón and Pilar Samoya, peasant farmers hear the news in their village near San Miguel. They have heard of the government's "death squads" who threaten villages like theirs and they are also concerned about the violence of the anti-government guerillas.

One night Pilar hears screams. The Samoyas' neighbor is taken away, his wife is shot and killed, and their house burned down. A short time later they hear that their land will be taken over. They discuss their options: leave and do farm work somewhere else, go to the city and work in a factory, or join the army.

Ramón and some others go to San Salvador to protest the land takeover. Ramón notices someone taking his photograph. A few days later some guerillas carrying guns come to the Samoyas' house. They tell him that they will help him keep his land if he joins them. He refuses. A few days after that five soldiers stop Ramón on the road. They question him and push his face into the hot road. They are ready to kill him when an old neighbor tells the soldiers that Ramón is just a simple neighbor. They tell Ramón that if he stays on the land they will kill him. That evening Ramón tells Pilar he must leave, but he will be back when things cool off.

Ramón walks to San Miguel and gets a visa for Mexico. He takes buses to the U.S. border and swims across the Rio Grande, but the Border Patrol catches him and puts him in jail. He signs papers saying he will return to El Salvador.

Back in El Salvador, Ramón goes to his village to find it is destroyed and his family is gone. He returns to Mexico and earns enough money to pay a coyote to take him across the border.

The coyote squeezes too many people into his van and leaves them in the Arizona desert. After a few days some of the people do not survive. Fortunately, they are rescued by two nuns who give them water and food and temporary sanctuary. They tell Ramón there is no point in asking for asylum, but they find a family who will give him sanctuary.

Living with Barney and Sarah Fuller takes some adjustment. Everything is new and different. Ramón has trouble sleeping, but he gets a job in a restaurant and works illegally. But he knows that living underground is better than not living at all.

One day the Fullers learn of a woman and two children living in Houston. Her name is Pilar but her family name is Mendez. When they tell Ramón, he is overwhelmed with joy because Pilar's maiden name was Mendez. The Fullers take Ramón to Houston and the family is reunited.

Pilar tells how some men came looking for Ramón after he left. She did not know where he was, but they beat her anyway. No longer feeling safe, she and the children found their way to a refugee camp in Honduras. Living in the camp was very unpleasant, so she took the children and stowed away in an empty box car. The train crossed into the U.S., but they were caught and put in a detention camp. An American refugee support group got her out of the camp and got sanctuary for her in Houston. The family was together again living in the Fullers' house. While living with the Fullers, Pilar received a letter from a friend in Maryland. The friend owned a restaurant and invited Pilar and Ramón to come and work for them.

Ramón and Pilar worked hard at the restaurant. Pilar's pupusa was a hit at the restaurant. The Samoyas settled into life in Maryland. They had two more children, and then in 1990 Pilar and the two children got Temporary Protected Status (TPS). Now they could stay in the U.S. legally.

Back in El Salvador, the civil war ended but life was not easy, and violent gangs made life dangerous. There was no reason to go back. Then when two earthquakes hit El Salvador, the Samoyas decided that they should try to help the displaced, just as they had been helped by so many people. They took in a young woman with a baby boy. Her name was Cristina. Her husband, Carlos, was still in El Salvador with an older son and daughter. At last Carlos came to Maryland. But when he came he came without the two children.

Eight years later, Cristina and Carlos' two children arrived in Maryland. They went to the local high school, but with no English they did not fit in. Instead they joined a dangerous MS-13 gang. The daughter Valeria became the girlfriend of a gang member, but the boy's girlfriend came with friends to attack Valeria. Her brother Vittorio came to protect her, but he was killed in a knife fight. With Pilar's help Valeria got away from the gang and began a new and better life.

In 2018 TPS was suspended, and thousands of immigrants faced deportation. Many still tried to cross the border. Ramón's nephew, José, was stopped at the border and he and his four-year-old daughter, Gabriela, were separated. José was sent back to El Salvador, and his daughter was placed in a children's detention center. Luckily, Sarah Fuller found the little girl and brought her to Maryland.

When Sarah arrived in Maryland it was the time of the annual Salvadoran festival. For that day everyone forgot their troubles and enjoyed the food, music, dancing, and fireworks. Ramón addressed the crowd, and told them that Archbishop Oscar Romero had been named a saint. He had been a good neighbor. And then Ramon urged everyone to pray for their friends and neighbors in Central America.

Neighbors

Historical Background

1524 – Spaniard Pedro de Alvarado conquers El Salvador.

1540 – Central American Indian resistance is crushed and El Salvador becomes a Spanish colony.

1821 – El Salvador becomes independent.

1932 – 30,000 people are killed in an unsuccessful uprising led by Augustine Farabundo Marti.

1961 – The right-wing National Conciliation Party (NCP) comes to power as a result of a military coup.

1977 – Guerillas of the left-wing Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) become more active after reports of human rights violations by government troops and death squads.

1979-81 – Around 30,000 people are killed by the army-backed death squads.



1980 – Archbishop Oscar Romero is assassinated.

1982 – Extreme right-wing National Republican Alliance (Arena) wins parliamentary elections marked by violence.

1989 – FMLN attacks increase. Presidential election is called fraudulent.

1991 – FMLN is recognized as a political party and the government and FMLN sign a peace agreement.

1997 – FMLN makes progress in parliamentary elections.

2001 – January and February – Massive earthquakes kill 1,200 people. One million are homeless.

2005 – Ilamatepec volcano erupts. Thousands flee.

2007 – Three members of the Arena party are murdered in Guatemala. Organized crime is suspected.

2009 – January -- FMLN party becomes the largest party in parliamentary elections.

2009 – February – Arena wins majority of local elections despite predictions.

2009 – November – More than 140 are killed in mudslides and floods. Thousands are homeless.

2010 – Gang members attack public buses. Fourteen are killed.

2011 – Rains and floods kill many.

2012 – Right-wing wins parliamentary elections.

2012-2019 – Deportations from the US result in increased gang violence and crime.

2014 – Salvador Sanchez Ceren, a candidate from the FMLN and a former guerilla leader is elected president.

2019 – Poverty continues to be a problem in El Salvador, as the country's largest source of foreign income is remittances sent by the more than 2 million Salvadorans living abroad. Salvadorans are still seeking refuge and asylum in the U.S. as gang violence continues to spread fear throughout the country.

Name _____

What Did You Read?

Write the answers to these questions about *Neighbors*.

1. Who shot Archbishop Romero?

2. What happened to Ramón and Pilar's neighbor, Felipe?

3. Why did Ramón protest against the government?

4. What happened to him after he protested?

5. What happened after Ramón swam across the Rio Grande?

6. Where did the coyote leave Ramón and the other people?

7. Why did Ramón have to live "underground"?

8. How did Pilar and the children get into the United States?

9. Why did they go to Maryland?

10. Who were Valeria and Vittorio?

11. What happened to Gabriela?

12. Who was at the festival with Ramón and Pilar?

For Answers see the Answer Key

Name _____

Book Report

Book Title _____

Student's Name _____

The people in this book came from _____

Is this book interesting? Why or why not? _____

The best part of the story is _____

The worst part of the story is _____

My favorite person in the story is _____

The main thing I learned from this book is _____

Are there too many hard words? yes / no

Examples: _____

Are there too many long sentences? yes / no

Example: _____

This book is: too long / too short / about right

Will you tell a friend to read this book? yes / no

Why? _____

Name _____

Word Play: Who, What, When, Where, Why, or How?

Change each statement below to a question. Each question will begin with *Who, What, When, Where, Why, or How* instead of what is underlined. In some sentences the order of the words will have to change. Be sure to use a question mark at the end instead of a period. The first one is done for you.

1. Someone is my neighbor.

Who is my neighbor?

2. Something is happening in El Salvador.

3. In some way they will continue.

4. For some reason they fight each other.

5. Ramón will go to someplace.

6. Ramón will go to Mexico at some time.

7. Ramón lived “underground” for some reason.

8. Something might have happened to Pilar.

9. Someone found Ramón in the desert.

10. Gabriela’s father’s name is something.

For Answers see the Answer Key

Fill in the Blanks

Review Activity

In the 1980s in El Salvador, the struggle for power between the government's _____ and the _____, causes widespread damage and _____. A peasant couple, Ramón and Pilar, see their _____ being taken away, his wife killed, and his _____ burned. Ramón becomes involved in a _____ and is marked for _____. He tries to escape to the _____ but is returned to El Salvador and discovers that his _____ was destroyed and his _____ gone. He again crosses the US _____ and is _____ from death in the _____ by two nuns. He is given sanctuary by a couple in _____. While there, he learns that his _____ is safe. Together again, they move to Maryland where they work in a _____. After several _____ they work to help others gain protected status and _____ in the U.S.

Full text of the fill in the blanks review activity

In the 1980s in El Salvador, the struggle for power between the government's army and the Guerillas, causes widespread damage and death. A peasant couple, Ramón and Pilar, see their neighbor being taken away, his wife killed, and his house burned. Ramón becomes involved in a protest and is marked for death. He tries to escape to the U.S. but is returned to El Salvador and discovers that his village was destroyed and his family gone. He again crosses the US border and is rescued from death in the desert by two nuns. He is given sanctuary by a couple in Texas. While there, he learns that his family is safe. Together again, they move to Maryland where they work in a restaurant. After several years they work to help others gain protected status and sanctuary in the U.S.

Answer Key

“*What Did You Read?*” questions are objective in nature; however, in some cases there may be more than one answer.

What Did You Read?

1. A person from the death squad.
2. He was taken away and probably “disappeared.”
3. His land would be taken away.
4. He was marked for death.
5. He was caught by the U.S. Border Patrol
6. In the Arizona desert.
7. He had no papers. He was illegal.
8. They got on a freight train.
9. A friend invited them to work in her restaurant.
10. They were Cristina and Carlos’ children.
11. Gabriela was separated from her father, but Sarah Fuller found her.
12. Sarah, Gabriela, Cristina, Carlos, and Valeria.

Word Play

1. Who is my neighbor?
2. What is happening in El Salvador?
3. How will they continue?
4. Why do they fight each other?
5. Where will Ramón go?
6. When will Ramón go to Mexico?
7. Why did Ramón live “underground?”
8. What might have happened to Pilar?
9. Who found Ramón in the desert?
10. What is Gabriela’s father’s name?