

## **Tortilla Curtain by T. Coraghessan Boyle**

Suggested activities in conjunction with the College Book Program

### **English:**

Pope John Paul II has asked for a world amnesty for illegal immigrants in the year 2000. "Almost everywhere today there is a tendency to close the frontiers and return to rigorous controls. Migration is spoken of more than before and always in more alarmist tones." (SDU-T Oct 10 A15)

Write an essay on how you think the world should celebrate the millennium.

### **History:**

Write a paper on the history of California and why some Mexicans and Mexican-Americans consider it land "stolen" from Mexico. Do you agree or disagree?

Compare the construction of the fence at the border with the Berlin Wall. (For discussion or essay)

### **Philosophy:**

Read the chapter in the book where Kyra is outraged about a dog locked in a car yet she doesn't seem to be as concerned about human suffering. Can you justify her views and actions? Why or why not? (For discussion or essay)

### **Biology:**

Read the chapter in The Tortilla Curtain where Kyra is outraged because of a dog locked in a car yet she seems unconcerned about human suffering. Remember the character "Radar" on M\*A\*S\*H? He said that "animals are people, too." Do you agree? How many rights should animals have? What about animal testing and vivisection? (For discussion or essay)

### **Spanish:**

Translate a conversation from the book into Spanish and read it aloud.

### **Theatre:**

Act out a scene from the book.

### **Math:**

Discuss the problems of census taking with regard to illegal immigrants.

Find statistics and make a graph for any of the following: the shift in countries of origin for recent immigrants as compared with the past, costs of illegal immigration, the number of deaths of illegal immigrants as Operation Gatekeeper has pushed immigrant crossings further to the east.

### **Geography:**

Make maps of California at various times in history (the present, under Mexico, etc.)

Make a map showing the shift of transborder crossings as a result of Operation Gatekeeper.

### **Psychology:**

What would be the effect on a driver of his inadvertently hitting an illegal immigrant crossing 805? (For discussion or essay)

Is the term "illegal immigrant" an unjustifiable stigma? (For discussion or essay)

**Economics:**

Research and discuss the costs and benefits of illegal immigration.

**Political Science:**

Should we have an open border between the U.S. and Mexico? What about elsewhere in the world? Does it make any difference if one of the countries is much wealthier than the other?

Is Operation Gatekeeper a good thing? Why or why not?

Some Mexicans say that California was "stolen" from them. The U.S. took land from the Native Americans. The Palestinians and the Israelis dispute the same land. Are all of these cases similar? Why or why not? How should land disputes be settled? Does current possession count?

Delaney says, "...immigrants are the lifeblood of this country." His friend Jack says "...cliches. There's a point of saturation..." Have we reached the point of saturation? (For discussion or essay)

**Art:**

How would you depict the despair felt by Candido?

**Nursing:**

The baby was born blind. Why? Could this have been prevented at birth? Before birth? Discuss the costs and ethics of providing medical care for illegal immigrants and for their babies born here.

**Business:**

What businesses use illegal immigrant labor? Can you find statistics? Should businesses be more severely punished for using such labor?

What would be the costs and benefits of a better "guest worker" policy for agriculture, for example? (For discussion or essay)

**Child Development:**

Do you think that children of illegal immigrants should automatically be made citizens of the U.S.? What about children of those who are not illegal immigrants but who are born when the mother is visiting the U.S.?

**Speech:**

Speak on any of these topics:

How to celebrate the millennium (the Pope says the world should celebrate by erasing borders and allowing free migration).

Costs vs. benefits of illegal immigration.

The character Delaney in the book says that everyone deserves a chance at life. Does that justify breaking the law?

Kyra was outraged by a dog locked in a car but insensitive to human suffering. Can she be justified?

The accident at the beginning of the book resulted in two victims: the illegal immigrant who was hit and the man who hit him. Do you agree or disagree?

Is Operation Gatekeeper working?

**Counseling/PD:**

What unique problems do children of illegal immigrants have?

**Administration of Justice:**

What are the desirable characteristics/personality traits for Border Patrol officers? Some people think that "illegal immigrant" is an inflammatory term and that "undocumented immigrant" is preferable. Discuss or write an essay.

**Chemistry:**

(For extra credit) The baby was born blind. Find the name and chemical formula for something that, when put into the eyes at birth, would have prevented blindness. Can you find out or estimate the cost per child?

**Engineering:**

List various methods of securing a border...wall, fence, trench, etc. What are the positives and negatives of each one? Find several places in the world where there is not an open border between two countries. What barriers are used in each case?

**DSS:**

Can you compare/contrast illegal immigrants and the disabled? What might they have in common (for example, a feeling of being outside the mainstream of American life)?