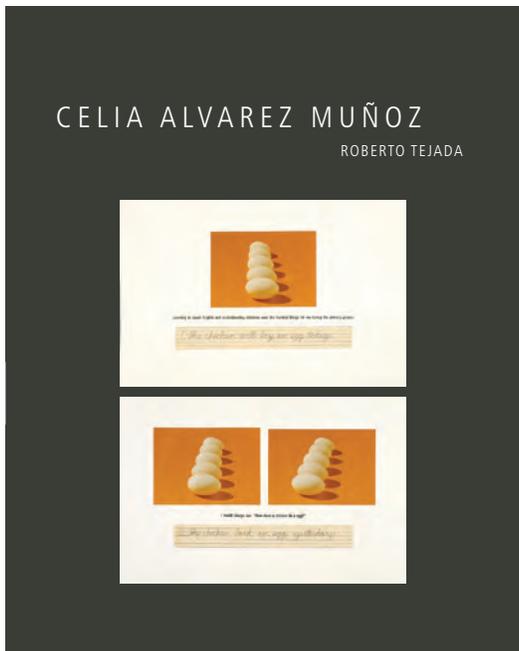




UCLA CHICANO STUDIES RESEARCH CENTER PRESS



# TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR *CELIA ALVAREZ MUÑOZ*

A VER: REVISIONING ART HISTORY,  
VOLUME 3

VERONICA ALVAREZ AND THERESA SOTO

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**A Ver: Revisioning Art History** stems from the conviction that individual artists and their coherent bodies of work are the foundation for a truly meaningful and diverse art history. This series explores the cultural, aesthetic, and historical contributions of Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, and other U.S. Latino artists. **A Ver ... Let's see!**



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# CELIA ALVAREZ MUÑOZ: STRADDLING LANGUAGES AND CULTURES



EXCERPTED AND ADAPTED FROM *CELIA ALVAREZ MUÑOZ*,  
BY ROBERTO TEJADA

Celia Alvarez Muñoz is a conceptual multimedia artist known for her writing, photography, painting, installation, and public art. Born in El Paso in 1937, Alvarez Muñoz grew up amidst competing cultures, languages, and value systems found along the U.S.-Mexico border, an experience that informs her art on several levels. She draws on family memories to explore the challenges, misconceptions, and misreadings that occur when cultures and languages meet and sometimes clash.

Alvarez Muñoz's interplay of image and text creates *indirectas* (innuendos), or bilingual puns, and provides opportunities for visual-verbal error. In her 1988 installation *Postales y Sin Remedio*, Alvarez Muñoz designed an environment in the Tyler Museum of Art by suspending three-dimensional street signs that corresponded to actual streets in El Paso. Unlike their real-life counterparts, the artist's street names used spellings that represented the peculiar pronunciation of accented English and Spanish: "Guadalooop" intersected Guadalupe Street, "Muertos" crossed Myrtle, and North "Marteenes" Street cornered North Martinez Street. Along the walls were large-format airbrushed images of houses with doors, but doors without handles or knobs, and scrolls, in the form of pages from a children's storybook, that recounted tales related to homeownership and private property.



Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *Postales y Sin Remedio*, 1988.  
Mixed media installation (detail), Tyler Museum of Art,  
Tyler, Texas.



Celia Alvarez Muñoz with her aunt Guadalupe Gómez, in 1946. Aunt Lulu, as Celia called her, gave Celia her first set of colored pencils.

The text and images in *Postales y Sin Remedio* evoked childhood, restricted access, and the creative confusion of bilingual experience—all themes that Alvarez Muñoz revisited throughout her artistic career.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF LEARNING

Alvarez Muñoz made a professional commitment to art in the 1970s when she began the coursework for her master of fine arts degree at North Texas State University in Denton (now the University of North Texas, Denton). Prior to focusing on her own studies, Alvarez Muñoz had earned her living as a schoolteacher. The principles of education and the structures of learning are referenced in nearly all aspects of her art making. Her “Enlightenment” series comprises nine artist’s books, each of which is part morality story, part childhood memory, and part social critique.

In *Enlightenment #4: Which Came First?* (illustrated on pages 14–15) Alvarez Muñoz recounts childhood memories of the challenges of learning English and confusion about the reproductive process of chickens. Through a sequence of typed sentences positioned above strips of paper bearing a child’s gawky handwriting, the narrative unfolds as follows:

Learning to speak English and understanding chickens were the hardest things for me during primary grades.

1. *The chicken will lay an egg today*

I would always ask, “How does a chicken lie a egg?”

2. *The chicken laid an egg yesterday.*

I was always corrected and told, “A chicken lays an egg through its mouth.”

3. *The chicken will lay an egg tomorrow*

I would sit attentively for hours in front of the chickens in hopes of witnessing the event.

4. *The chicken has laid an egg already.*

Unfortunately, they were always too fast for me.

5. *The chicken lies every day.*

The work explores the misrecognition that can take place in the classroom by recalling early grammar exercises that clarify the appropriate tense of the irregular verbs “lay” and “lie” in reference to “today,” “yesterday,” “tomorrow,” “already,” and “every day.” Each of the sentence pairs is accompanied by one or two photographs depicting five eggs aligned in single rows. At first sight, the eggs appear to be of equal size. The viewer might attribute this to the rules of perspective, which dictate that objects in the foreground appear larger than those in the background. In the last photograph, however, the viewer sees that the eggs are of different sizes, calling into question the viewer’s perspective of reality and illusion.

In many respects, Alvarez Muñoz’s art is about mining the possibilities that can follow a first glance. Indeed, at first glance her work may appear sentimental and nostalgic, a trip down memory lane. Closer inspection reveals that the seemingly small tales in her works reference big and complex ideas.

## DIALOGUE WITH THE PAST IN THE PRESENT DAY

With wit and intellect, Alvarez Muñoz finds ways to make personal content relevant to art history. Her work can be viewed from the perspective of mainstream American art produced during the social debates of the 1980s and 1990s.

Because she joins camera technologies to language, wall drawings, works on paper, sculpture, and site-specific art, her work is consistent with the overarching concerns of post-minimalist and postconceptual art making. In other words, the artist is concerned with both the concept and the object, the idea and the effect of the idea on the individual artist, the simplified form and the complex narrative. She challenges viewer's assumptions about art and their experience of it without sacrificing emotional resonance.

In her 1990 installation *Stories Your Never Mother Told You* (illustrated on pages 25–27), Alvarez Muñoz alluded to historical “cabinets of curiosities” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries while grounding the work in modern-day life. She reappropriated a dental cabinet and invited visitors to open its drawers, which were filled with objects that were scientific (medical equipment), or personal (stories written by members of the community), or both (teeth molds, which reflect an individual's lived experience).

Alvarez Muñoz's references to the past are not limited to art history. Her interest in border issues and her subsequent investigations of the Mexican Revolution and the Bracero Program informed her 1991 installation *El Límite* (illustrated here and on pages 20–21). Comprising camera-generated images and wall drawings, *El Límite* included a combination of personal and iconic imagery and text that was inspired by her father's experiences in World War II, which were affected by the Bracero Program, and her research on the Mexican Revolution. The artist placed large-scale photographs recalling her father's childhood and his wartime deployment in the same gallery as a re-imagined image of La Soldadera, an icon of the revolution.



Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *Fibra y Furia: Exploitation Is In Vogue* (detail), 1996–2002. Mixed media installation, Irving Arts Center, Irving, Texas.



Celia Alvarez Muñoz (left) and a museum curator assemble the train from sardine cans and other materials for an installation of *El Límite*.

Celia Alvarez Muñoz, landing for the Historic Civic Center River Link project, San Antonio, Texas, 2001. One of six landings designed by the artist in El Río Habla park.



### THE ARTIST'S POETIC STATEMENT

Whether Alvarez Muñoz inserts personal content into art history or explores the relationship between two cultures, she negotiates and straddles existing binaries. In a poetic statement, she equates her practice to the Rio Grande, whose course defines her birthplace and whose banks divide geography into political boundaries that cannot protect against cultural or symbolic blurring.

#### *Statement*

My work carries me, and my culture  
like the *Rio Grande*.

Bordering my birthplace, El Paso,  
it runs and gives passage to a boundless assortment of stories  
from both riverbanks in two languages.

Words and image meet, sweetly, wickedly, subversively,  
joining and locking the sensual or awkward.

Material and concept gush meaningful memories with new observations.

However eschew.

Deceptively simple tales spill into larger issues.

Knowing we belong to a tiny world pool  
that magnifies petty differences,  
it traces my own race and culture into the gulf streams and out to the  
big ocean.

It echoes the songs of the women in my family,  
those strong currents of my existence.

Who wrote satirical family poems in eloquent *Español*.

*Ellas*, who made magic: with Salsas  
on the dance floor, or *en la cocina*,  
And drew silver ribbons on colored *papel*.  
*Ellas*, who gurgled, book readings too fast,  
and accounted the savings to be better spent.

It speaks of the men, *Ellos*,  
who pulled guard three months straight  
near frozen wide rivers or in the coldest tundras of WWII.  
Who took me to ball games, played Spike Jones records,  
and sang with the comic, *Tin Tan*.  
*Ellos*, who created persona, cartoons,  
yet, seldom handled the money.

It races at a treacherous society and upholds women's roles.  
Contemplatively gathers questions,  
laughs in politically incorrect *carcajadas*.  
Or meets situations straight, *cara a cara-jadas!*  
It roars "what if," "*y por que*," kicking rapidly.  
Meandering through a variety of challenging forms,  
and sometimes satisfies my curiosity.

In this statement, the artist ponders how personal experience can translate into public meaning. The poem reflects the artist's capacity to create metaphor from the nonverbal understanding that exists prior to language and from the descriptive tangles that occur thereafter.

Alvarez Muñoz's work is informed by autobiography, a sentimental education, the poignancy of place, and the ambivalent status of national culture in the United States.

## LESSON 1

# ARTIST'S BOOKS: LAYERING IDEAS AND MEMORIES

*Grades: 9–12*

*Subjects: Visual Arts, Language Arts*

*Time Required: Three to four 45- to 50-minute class periods*

## LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will discuss three artist's books created by Celia Alvarez Muñoz: *Enlightenment #9: La Yodo* (1983), *Enlightenment #2: Double Bubble & WWII* (1980–82), and *Enlightenment #4: Which Came First?* (1982). Students will address how the artist creates new meanings by layering images with text and analyze how her art recounts childhood memories. They will then create their own artist's books.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students should be able to

- Analyze the juxtaposition of text and image in artist's books
- Analyze how Celia Alvarez Muñoz explores childhood memories in her works of art
- Use the terms *perspective* (point of view), *word play*, and *indirecta* (innuendo) or bilingual pun, and discuss how these strategies are employed in works of art
- Create an artist's book inspired by the works of Celia Alvarez Muñoz

## MATERIALS

- Background information: "Celia Alvarez Muñoz: Straddling Languages and Cultures" (pages 1–5)
- Overhead transparencies or digital images of three artist's books created by Alvarez Muñoz: *Enlightenment #9: La Yodo* (pages 10–11), *Enlightenment #2: Double Bubble & WWII* (pages 12–13), and *Enlightenment #4: Which Came First?* (pages 14–15)
- Overhead projector or a computer with an LCD projector, depending on type of reproductions available
- Art supplies and materials that students can use to create artist's books: paper, poster board, colored pencils or markers, old magazines for found images

## LESSON STEPS

*Warm-up: Defining and Re-Defining Books*

1. Lead a discussion about the definition of *book*. Ask students to list characteristics of books and write their responses on the board. Also ask students to identify their assumptions about books. Guide students to consider how the content of a book is normally organized (for example, sequential narrative, alphabetical entries), the types of materials used to create a book (such as paper, cardboard, thread), and the structure and form of the book (including size, shape, binding).
2. Tell students that they will be learning about artist's books, which are works of art that are inspired by the form or function of books. Artist's books, which developed as an art

form in the twentieth century, can incorporate a variety of content (for example, stories, poetry, found text, illustrations, paintings), media (paper, cardboard, wood, and so on), and techniques (such as fine printing, collage, computer and electronic arts, traditional and experimental bindings).

### Analyzing Artist's Books

1. Display the series of pages from *Enlightenment #9: La Yodo* by Celia Alvarez Muñoz. Begin a discussion of the work by asking students to share their immediate reactions to the work. Then ask students the following:
  - What memory from childhood is Alvarez Muñoz exploring?
  - Does this work of art remind you of anything that happened in your childhood?
  - How do the images of the doll change from beginning to end?
  - How did the ending make you feel? What was surprising about it?
  - What do you notice about the materials used to create *Enlightenment #9*?
  - What do you notice about its structure and form (that is, its size and shape, how the pages are bound or combined)?
  - What connections can you make between the materials, structure, or form of the work of art and the content that is being conveyed?
  - Do you consider this work to be a book? Why or why not?
  - What is the relationship between the images and the text? How would the meaning of the work of art change if only the text were provided?
2. Review student responses about *Enlightenment #9: La Yodo* and point out that Alvarez Muñoz explores a childhood memory of a misconception through a succession of images and sentences that culminate in a surprising and alarming ending. In the last image, viewers see the back of the doll's head, which has a large patch without hair. Explain that some contemporary artists suggest new meanings through the strategy of juxtaposition, which refers to the placement of images and/or text side by side or close together, encouraging viewers to make connections between them.
3. Have students work in teams to discuss another artist's book created by Alvarez Muñoz. Allow them to choose between *Enlightenment #2: Double Bubble & WWII* and *Enlightenment #4: Which Came First?* and pass out reproductions of both works of art. Tell students to discuss the following questions in their small groups:
  - What are your immediate reactions to the work of art?
  - What memory is Alvarez Muñoz recounting? How is it similar to or different from the memory explored in *Enlightenment #9: La Yodo*?
  - What do you notice about the materials used to create *Enlightenment #2* (or *Enlightenment #4*)?
  - What do you notice about its structure and form (that is, its size and shape, how the pages are bound or combined)?
  - What connections can you make between the materials, structure, or form of the work of art and the content that is being conveyed?
  - Does this work of art remind you of anything you remember from your childhood or learned in U.S. or world history?
  - How does the juxtaposition of images and text change from beginning to end?
  - How did the ending make you feel? Was there anything surprising about it?
  - Do you consider this work to be a book? Why or why not?
  - What is the relationship between the images and the text? How would the meaning change if only the text were provided?

4. Ask groups who discussed *Enlightenment #2: Double Bubble & WWII* to share their ideas. Point out that Alvarez Muñoz created the work by altering a Nazi propaganda book that was given to her by her father after his military service. Introduce the term *perspective* to students. Explain to students that perspective (or point of view) is used to relay the events of a story and sometimes helps readers to understand the feelings and motives of characters. Ask students the following:
  - Why do you think the artist used the perspective of a child who lived through the war?
  - How would the meaning of the work of art be different if pages from the Nazi propaganda book were not juxtaposed with the narrative from the child’s perspective?
  - What do you think is the significance of Double Bubble gum?
5. Ask groups who discussed *Enlightenment #4: Which Came First?* to share their ideas. Point out that the work explores the idea that truth is revealed only in distortions, especially when an individual’s memory is involved. Point out Alvarez Muñoz’s use of word play. Explain that word play is a literary technique that involves puns, such as using one word and referencing two meanings or “playing” with the sounds of the words in relation to one another. Focus on Alvarez Muñoz’s use of word play through the multiple usages of the words *lay* and *lie*. Ask students to consider how these two words have multiple meanings and connotations. Have students discuss how Alvarez Muñoz engages with these various meanings and connotations in her work.
6. Explain that Alvarez Muñoz also uses the *indirecta* (innuendo)—a bilingual pun. The orange-yellow backdrop in the photograph calls to mind an egg’s yolk. The word *yolk*, if stated by a speaker of Spanish-accented English, could be misconstrued as *joke*.
7. Ask students to consider the title of the series, “Enlightenment.” Invite them to share their thoughts on why they think the series was given that title.
8. Return to the list of student responses about books. Ask students how their definition has shifted based on their discussions of Alvarez Muñoz’s works and whether they have anything to add to their list of characteristics.

#### *Creating Artist’s Books*

1. Students will create an artist’s book that juxtaposes images and text. The artist’s book can take any of the following forms inspired by *Enlightenment #9*, *Enlightenment #2*, and *Enlightenment #4*, respectively:
  - Option 1: Choose a childhood memory that you are uncertain happened exactly as you remember it. Recount the memory in a sequential order through text and image and include an unexpected ending.
  - Option 2: Choose a book, pamphlet, or magazine that reminds you of a historical event that happened when you were a child. Alter the original publication by cutting or copying images from the original and placing them into your own artist’s book. Add text that recounts the event from the perspective of a child at the time that the event occurred.
  - Option 3: Choose a subject or topic that was challenging to learn in elementary school. Recount a memory of learning that topic or subject by juxtaposing text and images. Your work of art must include some kind of word play and could include bilingual puns.
2. Allow students some class time to work on their projects. When the artist’s books are complete, display them in a class exhibition.

## ASSESSMENT

Assess students' participation in class discussions, including their appropriate use of the terms *perspective*, *word play*, and *indirecta*.

Artworks should be assessed on each student's effectiveness at creating a work that:

- Is in the form of an artist's book.
- Juxtaposes image and text.
- Explores a historical event or a childhood memory.
- Includes an unexpected ending, an account from the perspective of a child, or word play.

## EXTENSION

Ask students to discuss Alvarez Muñoz's poetic artist statement (page 3) and analyze what information she conveys about her work. Then have them write poetic artist's statements about their own artist's books.

## STANDARDS ADDRESSED

*National Visual Arts Standards—Grades 9–12*

Standard 1: Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts.

Standard 3: Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas.

Standard 5: Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.

*National English-Language Arts Standards— Grades 9–12*

Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Standard 12: Uses spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).



Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *Enlightenment #9: La Yodo*, 1983.  
Mixed media, maple honey box with seven 9¼ x 12½  
inch framed pages.



SHE HAD A BROTHER WHO WE WATCHED PLAY IN THE SNOW  
WHEN WE HAD TO STAY INDOORS. HE WAS OLDER.



THE OTHER DAY I CALLED MY MOTHER TO ASK IF "LA YODO"  
WAS EVER REAL.



"LA YODO," OR IODINE, WAS THE NAME I GAVE MY IMAGINARY FRIEND.  
SHE WAS FAIR AND LIGHT COMPLETED.



"YES," SHE ANSWERED, "SHE LIVED A BLOCK AWAY FROM OUR HOUSE,  
HER NAME WAS HONEY



"LA YODO" WAS ALWAYS GETTING INTO TROUBLE, SO I WOULD TAKE HER  
BY THE EAR AS PUNISHMENT FOR HER ACTIONS.



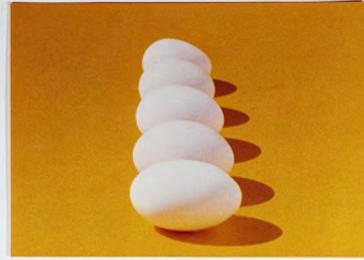
AND SHE WAS A VERY SWEET LITTLE GIRL."

Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *Enlightenment #9: La Yodo*, 1983.  
Mixed media, maple honey box with seven 9¼ x 12½  
inch framed pages.





Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *Enlightenment #4: Which Came First?*, 1982. Mixed media, yellow box with five 12 x 19 inch pages.



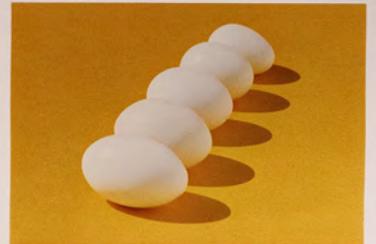
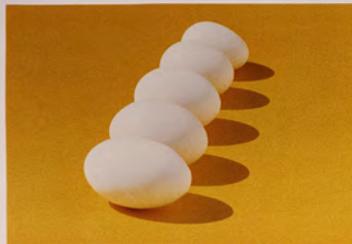
Learning to speak English and understanding chickens were the hardest things for me during the primary grades.

1. The chicken will lay an egg today.



I would always ask, "How does a chicken lie a egg?"

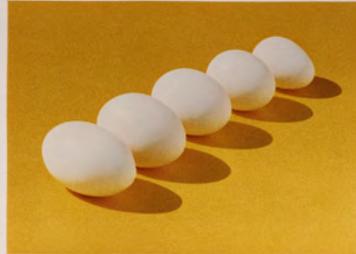
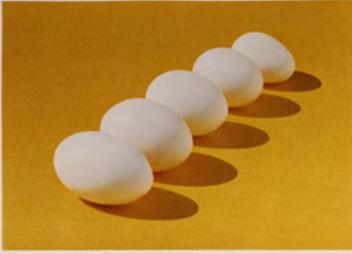
2. The chicken laid an egg yesterday.



I was always corrected and told, "A chicken lays an egg through its mouth."

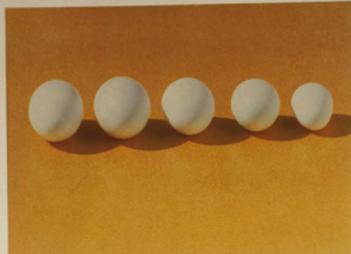
3. The chicken will lay an egg tomorrow.

Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *Enlightenment #4: Which Came First?*, 1982. Mixed media, yellow box with five 12 x 19 inch pages.



I would sit attentively for hours in front of the chickens in hopes of witnessing the event.

4. The chicken has laid an egg already.



Unfortunately, they were always too fast for me.

5. The chicken lies everyday.

## LESSON 2

# DEPICTING BORDER ISSUES

*Grades: 10–12*

*Subjects: Visual Arts, History-Social Sciences*

*Time Required: Four 45- to 50-minute class periods*

## LESSON OVERVIEW

Working in small groups, students will research and report on one of two historical events that concern border issues between the United States and Mexico: the Bracero Program and the Mexican Revolution. Students will analyze and discuss Celia Alvarez Muñoz's *El Límite* (1991), which addresses border issues related to her family's biography. The lesson culminates in the creation of a visual representation of the border issue they chose, inspired by Muñoz's artwork.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students should be able to:

- Research and report on either the Mexican Revolution or the Bracero Program
- Use information learned from their research to analyze an installation piece by Alvarez Muñoz
- Create a collaborative artwork about border issues

## MATERIALS

- Background information: "Celia Alvarez Muñoz: Straddling Languages and Cultures" (pages 1–5)
- Overhead transparencies or digital images, plus photocopies, of details of Celia Alvarez's *El Límite* (pages 20–21)
- Overhead projector or a computer with an LCD projector, depending on type of reproductions available
- Writing paper and pencils
- Art supplies and materials that students can use to create works of art: printed, scanned, or photocopied images, red ballpoint pens, color pencils, colored chalk or charcoal, poster board, tape

## LESSON STEPS

*Warm-up: Growing Up along the Border*

1. Begin a class discussion of broad issues that can have an impact on countries that share a border. This may include any of the following:
  - Political issues.
  - Economic issues.
  - Geographical issues such as allocation of resources.
  - Cultural issues such as language, immigration, customs.List student responses on the board.

2. Pass out copies of “Celia Alvarez Muñoz: Straddling Languages and Cultures.” Have students read the information, then ask them to point out examples of how growing up in a town along the U.S.-Mexico border impacted the artist’s life and influenced her art. Refer to the student responses listed on the board and discuss which (if any) were relevant to her upbringing.

### *Researching the Impact of Border Issues*

1. In groups of four, have students research the effect of either the Mexican Revolution or the Bracero Program on border relations between the United States and Mexico. Have each group report their findings to the rest of the class. Make sure that students include primary sources and individual accounts.
2. Display images of *El Límite* and ask groups to discuss the following:
  - What do they notice, in general, about the artwork?
  - What materials did Alvarez Muñoz use?
  - How does the installation help tell a story?
  - Does the information in “Celia Alvarez Muñoz: Straddling Languages and Cultures” and their group research help them interpret this artwork? Why or why not?
3. Lead a class discussion of *El Límite* as it relates to the Mexican Revolution, inviting students to share their research. Have students analyze the detail of La Soldadera, using the following prompts:
  - Who is this woman? Describe the figure.
  - What do you think she is doing? Describe her pose.
  - Where do you think she is looking? Why?
  - What era is she from? Look at her clothing for clues.Explain that *soldaderas* were, generally, camp followers who sometimes took up arms during the Mexican Revolution. Point out that the U.S.-Mexican border was transformed by the locomotive: people were able to travel much more quickly and efficiently and, as a result, new opportunities arose for work, travel, shopping, and sightseeing. In one unique example, on May 10, 1911, Americans in El Paso, Texas, climbed atop freight cars to look into Mexico as the city of Juárez was captured by the rebel army.
4. Have students analyze the detail of the cameraman and Native Americans. Use the following prompts:
  - Who are these men? Describe the figures.
  - What do you think they are doing? Describe their poses.
  - What do you think they are doing? Why?
  - What era are they from? Look at their clothing for clues.
5. Using an overhead transparency or projected digital image, lead a class discussion of *El Límite* as it relates to the Bracero Program, inviting students to share their research. Inform students that World War II caused a severe labor shortage in the United States that was addressed by the Bracero Program, an agreement between the Mexican and U.S. governments whereby Mexican immigrants filled necessary jobs in the United States, often those vacated by U.S. soldiers. Show students the detail of the train assembled from sardine cans. Note that Alvarez Muñoz uses this reference to point out that trains transported Mexican immigrants to their new jobs across the border and her father to his posts as a World War II soldier.

6. As a class, discuss Celia Alvarez Muñoz's life as a Chicana along the U.S.-Mexico border, where she was exposed to two cultures, languages, and value systems. Consider how these influences affected her as a woman, how they were part of her family's history, and how she incorporated them into *El Límite*.

#### *Depicting Border Issues*

1. Tell students who researched the Mexican Revolution that they are going to make a work of art based on an iconic image, just as Alvarez Muñoz used the iconic images of La Soldadera and the cameraman in *El Límite*.
2. Instruct students to select an image that will help tell a story, discovered during their research, about the U.S.-Mexico border. Ask them to consider whether the questions of who, what, when, where, and why can be easily answered by looking at the image chosen. Photocopy or print the image.
3. Have students transfer the image onto poster board by following these steps:
  - Rub pencil, colored chalk, or charcoal across the *entire back* of the photocopy or printout.
  - Lay the picture on top of poster board and use a little tape to hold it in place.
  - Use a red ballpoint pen to trace the image, lifting up the edge from time to time to see how the image is transferring. Students should choose which elements to transfer and which to leave out. Remind them that Alvarez Muñoz decided to leave out the face of La Soldadera.
  - After the image is transferred, use an accent color to highlight an important part of the image.
4. Tell students who researched the Bracero Program that they are going to make a work of art that uses found objects, just as Alvarez Muñoz used sardine cans and other objects to re-create the trains her father made as a young boy.
5. Instruct students to choose a personal account, discovered during their research, of someone who participated in the Bracero program.
6. Have students use found objects that symbolize or illustrate the story.
7. Instruct students to incorporate parts of the text to help tell their narrative.

#### ASSESSMENT

Assess students' participation in class discussions and participation in group research. Artwork should be assessed on students' selection of a historic image or narratives that effectively addresses a border issues discussed in the lesson. Assessment can be done by you, by classmates, and/or within the group.

#### EXTENSION

Have students research current border issues between the United States and Mexico, making sure to look at perspectives from an individual from each of the two countries. Instruct students to create a work of art that includes an image and text that addresses the issue.

## STANDARDS ADDRESSED

### *National Visual Arts Standards—Grades 6–12*

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts.

Standard 3: Chooses and evaluates a range of subject matter, symbols, and ideas.

Standard 4: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

Standard 5: Understands the characteristics and merits of one's own artwork and the artwork of others.

Standard 6: Makes connections between visual arts and other disciplines.

### *National History-Social Science Standards—Grades 6–12*

Standard 4: Understands patterns of nationalism, state-building, and social reform in Europe and the Americas, 1830–1914

Standard 8: Understands the causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs.

Standard 10: Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States.



Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *El Límite*, 1991. Mixed media installation, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego.



Some stories stemmed from trips to the Golden State on trains, he jumped on in El Paso, during the depression years. My favorite stories dealt with The War when he was moved across the world and throughout Europe, again, mostly by train. Little do we know that colic couplings may well become the main ingredients required to survive.



Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *El Límite*, 1991. Mixed media installation, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego.



Stories by Dad came from two sources; invented and real life adventures. At times hard to separate or distinguish. En las arenas, near the railroad tracks, they played with toys made out of things that don't belong together. Like combinations we were warned against. Nunca, never, eat watermelon during a certain time of the month. Nunca, tome leche cuando coma pescado. Nunca, tome un helado cuando ajitado.



## LESSON 3

# COLLECTIONS AND RECOLLECTIONS: CREATING CABINETS OF CURIOSITIES

*Grades: 6–12*

*Subjects: Visual Arts, Language Arts, and History-Social Sciences*

*Time Required: Three 45- to 50-minute class periods*

### LESSON OVERVIEW

Students will discuss and analyze Celia Alvarez Muñoz's *Stories Your Mother Never Told You* (1990). In groups, students will research the history of *Wunderkammern* or "cabinets of curiosities" and compare them with the cabinet in Muñoz's work. Students will create their own "cabinet of curiosities" that utilizes concepts found in *Stories Your Mother Never Told You*.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students should be able to:

- Analyze Celia Alvarez Muñoz's *Stories Your Mother Never Told You*
- Research the history of *Wunderkammern*, or "cabinets of curiosities"
- Use the research conducted as a basis for comparison with Alvarez Muñoz's work
- Create their own "cabinets of curiosities"

### MATERIALS

- Transparencies or digital images of Alvarez Muñoz's *Stories Your Mother Never Told You* (pages 25–27)
- Overhead projector or a computer with an LCD projector, depending on type of reproductions available
- Writing paper and pencils
- Art supplies that students can use to create a "cabinet of curiosity": shoeboxes (one per student), colored pencils, metallic gold and silver pencils, glitter glue pens, tempera or acrylic paint, gold and silver foil, scraps of fabric

### LESSON STEPS

*Warm-up: Recording Childhood Memories*

1. Have students write down a childhood memory.
2. Ask students to think about:
  - Why they chose that memory?
  - What object(s) are associated with that memory?
  - What is *particularly* meaningful and/or memorable about that event?
  - If others were involved in the memory, do they think that the person or persons would remember the event in the same way? Why or why not?
  - Are there any nursery rhymes that they can associate with that event?

3. Discuss ways in which people store memories (through photo albums, video recordings, journals, flickr, etc.). Discuss ways in which communities store memories (documentaries, historic houses, museums, etc.).
4. Have students share how they would like to store or record their childhood memory. Would they keep it private (like in a journal) or make it public (place it in a museum, or post it on MySpace or Facebook)?
5. Tell students that they will be learning about an artist who creates works of art that is meant to store childhood memories and recollections by community members.

#### *Comparing Cabinets of Curiosities*

1. Display several images of Celia Alvarez Muñoz's *Stories Your Mother Never Told You*. As a class, discuss the work. Explain to students that initially, her installation consisted of a dental cabinet, its drawers filled with a variety of articles. Visitors had to interact with the work of art by opening the drawers to reveal things such as medical equipment (alluding to science), teeth molds (objects that forensically identify an individual, yet are a testament to their lived experiences), text of childhood memories of the artist, and stories collected by Alvarez Muñoz of members of a particular community. Inform students that as the work was installed in different locations, Alvarez Muñoz elaborated by adding an intricate wall drawing of a "tree of life" and two large scrolls in which viewers could leave personal memories and recollections.
2. Ask students if they would have liked the childhood memory that they chose in the warm-up to be represented in *Stories Your Mother Never Told You*. If not, ask them to select a different memory to share.
3. Discuss the fact that by reappropriating a dental cabinet and inviting visitor interaction, Alvarez Muñoz was alluding to *Wunderkammern*, or "cabinets of curiosities," which were popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In groups, have students research the history of *Wunderkammern*. Students should discover that *Wunderkammern* were made for private use and that they were constructed with precious materials. *Wunderkammern* were meant to show the owner's collection of expensive objects, rare natural wonders, and the latest scientific findings in order to impress friends and acquaintances.
4. Have the groups compare and contrast *Wunderkammern* with Alvarez Muñoz's dental cabinet. Ask them to consider the following:
  - What types of materials are used in each of these "cabinets of curiosities"?
  - What is their function?
  - What kinds of objects were collected in each?
  - Who would have access to these types of cabinets?
  - How were each of the cabinets displayed?
 Have each group report its findings. Point out that in contrast to *Wunderkammern*, Alvarez Muñoz's cabinet is part of a larger installation that is meant for public viewing and interaction.
5. As a class, discuss what new technologies, materials, and objects would impress today's viewers.

#### *Creating Cabinets of Curiosities*

1. Have students create their own "cabinets of curiosity" that incorporate concepts found in *Stories Your Mother Never Told You*, such as science and individualism, and objects or

text that evoke childhood memories. Students can create their cabinet either by using a ready-made one and reappropriating it, as Alvarez Muñoz did, or by making one using a shoebox. Instruct students to decorate their cabinets with materials, designs, or symbols that will impress friends and acquaintances.

2. Ask students to collect items to fill their cabinets. Items should represent new technologies or discoveries (these can be images or text) and objects or written accounts of their childhood. Students can also interview family members and include these accounts in their “cabinets of curiosities.”
3. Remind students that the cabinet was one element of *Stories Your Mother Never Told You* and point out that Alvarez Muñoz intended viewers to participate in the work itself (opening the cabinet drawers, recording their memories on the scrolls). With these things in mind, have students present their cabinets in a class exhibition. As a class, discuss how the cabinets will be displayed and whether the exhibition will include additional objects, such as a bench, text, or big rolls of butcher paper so students can add additional commentary or recollections.

### ASSESSMENT

Assess students’ participation in class discussions and thoroughness of research conducted on *Wunderkammern*.

Student artwork should be assessed on its effectiveness in creating a “cabinet of curiosities” that includes objects and/or references to new technologies or scientific innovations *and* objects or text of childhood memories.

### EXTENSION

Ask students to research their family genealogy and create a “tree of life” in a style that symbolizes/respects their respective culture (as Alvarez Muñoz noted, in subsequent installations, the tree morphed into a “controlled bonsai, the hardest, oldest oak, the fragile willow...tallest pine...hardy bamboo...symmetrical none-bearing pear”). Have students display their “tree of life” with their “cabinet of curiosities.

### STANDARDS ADDRESSED

*National Visual Arts Standards—Grades 6–12*

Standard 1: Understands and applies media, techniques, and processes related to the visual arts.

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Standard 6: Makes connections between visual arts and other disciplines.

*National English-Language Arts Standards—Grades 6–12*

Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

*National History-Social Science Standards—Grades 6–12*

Standard 2: Understands how European society experienced political, economic, and cultural transformations in an age of global intercommunication, 1450–1750

Standard 6: Understands economic, political, and cultural interrelations among peoples of Africa, Europe, and the America’s, 1500–1750.



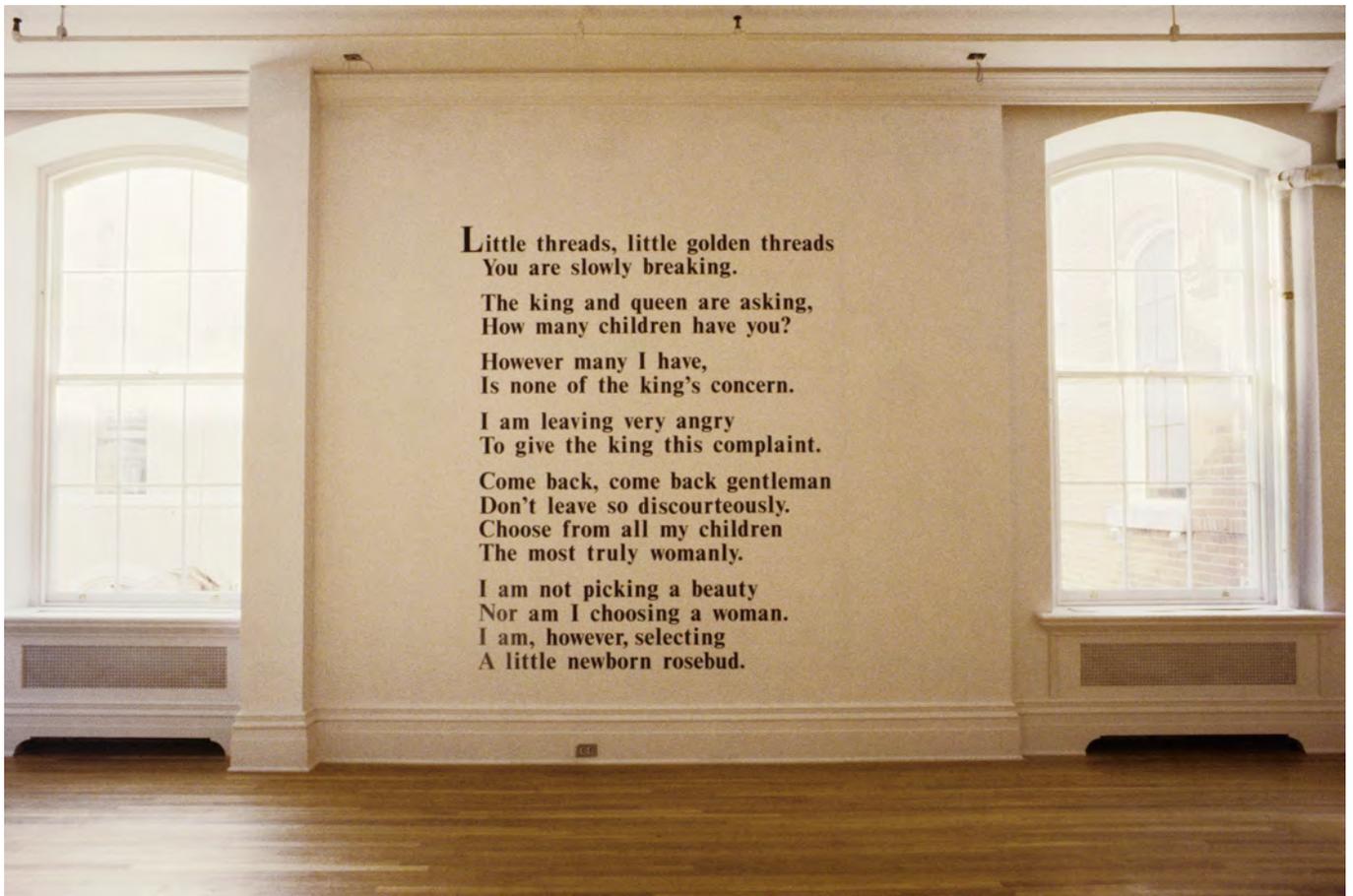
Celia Alvarez Muñoz,  
*Stories Your Mother  
 Never Told You*, 1990.  
 Mixed media installation.  
 Snug Harbor Cultural  
 Center, Staten Island,  
 New York. This view  
 shows the dental cabinet  
 and the "tree of life."



Celia Alvarez Muñoz,  
*Stories Your Mother  
 Never Told You*, 1990.  
 Detail of the dental  
 cabinet with two open  
 drawers.



Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *Stories Your Mother Never Told You*, 2002. Mixed media installation. Mexic-Arte Museum, Austin, Texas. The scrolls allowed visitors to record personal recollections.



Celia Alvarez Muñoz, *Stories Your Mother Never Told You*, 1990. Mixed media installation. Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Staten Island, New York. The text is a nursery rhyme that the artist also incorporated into other works.

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## ARTICLES, CHAPTERS, AND BOOKS

Erickson, Mary. "Celia Alvarez Muñoz." In Gary D. Keller, Joaquín Alvarado, Kaytie Johnson, and Mary Erickson, *Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art: Artists, Works, Culture, and Education*, vol. 1: 40–41. Tempe, AZ: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 2002.

A short biography of the artist, touching on her life story and emergence as an artist. Includes several color images of her work.

Freudenheim, Susan. "Cultural Concepts." *Los Angeles Times*, Calendar, March 3, 1991, 4.

The artist discusses her career and shares childhood stories that influence her work.

Henkes, Robert. *Latin American Women Artists of the United States: The Works of Thirty-three Twentieth-Century Women*. Jefferson, NC: MCFarland, 1990.

An introduction to Alvarez Muñoz's artistic career and influences, incorporating discussions of several of her mixed-media works.

Lippard, Lucy. *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*. New York: New Press, 1998, 24–25.

Lippard contextualizes Alvarez Muñoz's *Herencia: Now What?* in a poetic essay on space, culture, and community.

———. *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1990, 100.

Alvarez Muñoz's *Tolido* is one of the works highlighted in this exploration of tradition, memory, belief, ritual, and storytelling in multicultural art.

Muñoz, Celia Alvarez. "Oral History Interview with Celia Alvarez Muñoz." Interview by Cary Cordova, Arlington, TX, February 7, 8, and 28, 2004. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. <http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/munoz04.htm>.

Comprehensive interview with the artist conducted as part of the Smithsonian Institution's *Recuerdos Orales: Interviews of the Latino Art Community in Texas* project. The artist talks about her family and growing up in El Paso, her education, and her career and describes the inspiration for and creation of several of her works.

Pérez, Laura E. *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.

Alvarez Muñoz's installations, artist's books, and public art projects are discussed within a broader landscape of Chicana art production. Includes color illustrations and a close reading of Muñoz's installation piece *Fibra y Furia: Exploitation Is In Vogue*, the artist's response to the Ciudad Juárez murders.

San Martin, Nancy. "Death in the Desert: Speaking Out: Two Artists Expose the Abuse." *Latina*, February 2000, 97–103.

Alvarez Muñoz discusses *Fibra y Furia: Exploitation Is In Vogue*, which is dedicated to the women murdered in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and their mothers.

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