

# MEXODIUS

**STUDY  
GUIDE**

**Grades 6-12**

**FOR TEACHERS, STUDENTS,  
AND COMMUNITY LEARNING**

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## **ABOUT MEXODUS & THE MEXODUS STUDY GUIDE**

MEXODUS is a live-looping hip-hop musical unlike anything you've seen before. You know the story of the Underground Railroad that ran North—but this show takes you on the path that ran South, revealing the untold journey of thousands who escaped slavery by crossing the Rio Grande into Mexico. Created and performed by Brian Quijada and Nygel D. Robinson, and directed by David Mendizábal, MEXODUS follows a freedom seeker and an unlikely ally as they forge a remarkable bond that transcends borders.

This study guide provides teachers, students, and community learners with a comprehensive framework to engage with MEXODUS prior to, during, and after seeing the show. It includes historical context, thematic exploration, discussion prompts, and creative activities designed to deepen understanding of history, migration, cultural identity, and storytelling through music and performance.

## MEXODUS SHOW VOCABULARY

**ANCESTORS** (noun): one from whom a person is descended and who is usually more remote in the line of descent than a grandparent

**BORDERLAND** (noun) land that is at or near a border; frontier.

**CULTURE** (noun) the language, customs, ideas, and art of a particular group of people.

**ENSLAVED** (adjective) held involuntarily and forced under threat of violence or death to work without pay for the profit of another

**FREEDOM** (noun): the state of being free to act or move as one wishes.

**HIP-HOP** (noun): the culture of rap music and its associated styles of dance, dress, behavior, and speech, which originated among young, African Americans in the 1970s.

**JUSTICE** (noun): the upholding of what is fair, just, and right.

**LIBERATION** (noun): a movement seeking equal rights and status for a group

**LOOPING** (verb): in music, it is a short section of audio that repeats continuously, creating a foundational texture or rhythmic pattern of a song.

**MIGRATION/MIGRATE** (verb): to move from one country, place, or locality to another

**RESISTANCE** (noun): opposing power of one force against another.

**RIO GRANDE** (geographical name): a 1885-mile-long river in the southwestern U.S. forming the boundary between Mexico and Texas.

**SOLIDARITY** (noun): a feeling of unity based on common goals, interests, and sympathies among a group's members.

**ORAL HISTORY** (noun): stories, personal experiences, and reflections that are spoken and share information about past historical events or traditions.

## Teacher Facing Pre-Show Lesson Plan

Grades 6-8

<b>MEXODUS Pre-Show Lesson:</b> Setting the Historical Stage	<b>Grade Level:</b> 6-8
<b>Objective:</b> Students will explore the historical context of slavery, resistance, and the Underground Railroad, with a focus on the southern route into Mexico. They will analyze primary sources, work with maps, and reflect on how the concept of freedom changes across borders.	<b>Common Core Standards:</b> <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1</b> – Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2</b> – Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7</b> – Integrate visual information with other information in print and digital texts. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1</b> – Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 8 topics and texts.
<b>Materials Needed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Copies of selected primary sources (runaway slave ads, memoir excerpts, abolitionist writings, Mexican anti-slavery law excerpts)</li><li>• Large map of North America (physical or digital interactive map)</li><li>• Markers or sticky notes for map annotation</li><li>• Projector or smartboard for displaying visual materials</li><li>• Student journals or composition notebooks</li></ul>	
<b>Lesson:</b> <b>Warm-Up Discussion (10 min)</b> Prompt students:  <i>“When you hear the term ‘Underground Railroad,’ what comes to mind? Take a moment to write down or draw your thoughts before answering.”</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Write student responses on the board.</li></ul>	

- Note assumptions about direction (north toward Canada)
- Leave room to introduce the southern routes.

### **Primary Source Analysis (25 min)**

- Divide students into small groups.
- Give each group a different primary source (e.g., 1829 Mexican decree abolishing slavery, narrative from a freedom seeker who traveled south, U.S. newspaper coverage).

### **Guiding Questions:**

1. Who wrote this, and why?
2. What does it tell you about escaping to Mexico?
3. How might geography have shaped the journey?
4. How would politics have affected this journey?
5. Do you notice any cultural things that may have affected this journey?

Have groups record their findings and share one key point with the class.

### **Interactive Map Activity (15 min)**

- Display a large map of North America showing U.S. slave states, free states, Mexico, and Canada circa mid-1800s.
- Students first trace the northern Underground Railroad routes they already know.
- Then, add southern routes into Mexico based on the information provided.
- Identify and label major crossing points (e.g., Rio Grande).
- Discuss challenges (deserts, rivers, military patrols, cultural and language barriers).

### **Class Discussion – “What Does Freedom Look Like Across Borders?” (10 min)**

Prompts:

- How might crossing into Mexico have felt different from reaching Canada?
- What role did language, culture, and politics play in defining “freedom”?
- What migration or refugee stories today reflect similar struggles?

### **Post Lesson Reflection:**

Students write a short reflection or journal entry imagining the journey of someone who escaped to Mexico, integrating facts learned from the lesson.

## Student Facing Pre-Show Lesson Plan

Grades 6-8

### MEXODUS Pre-Show Lesson: Setting the Historical Stage

Before attending MEXODUS, we will explore the historical context of slavery, resistance, and the Underground Railroad, including the southern route into Mexico. Through this lesson, you'll analyze primary sources, explore maps, and discuss how the meaning of freedom changes across borders.

#### **Objective:**

Understand the history and significance of the Underground Railroad's southern route into Mexico, and consider how geography, politics, and culture shaped freedom seekers' journeys.

#### **Materials Needed:**

- Pen or pencil
- Marker
- Sticky notes
- Journal or composition notebook

#### **Lesson:**

##### **Warm-Up Discussion**

Prompt:

*When you hear the term 'Underground Railroad,' what comes to mind?*

Write down your initial thoughts or draw mental images. Be ready to share with the class.

##### **Primary Source Analysis**

In small groups, you will look at and read a historical document. Use these guiding questions:

1. Who wrote this and why?
2. What does it tell you about escaping to Mexico?
3. How might geography have shaped the journey?
4. How would politics have affected this journey?
5. Do you notice any cultural things that may have affected this journey?

Be ready to share your group's findings.

### **Interactive Map Activity**

Working as a class, we will use a map of North America to draw out the routes of the Underground Railroad.

1. First, mark the northern routes to free states and Canada.
2. Next, mark the southern routes into Mexico based on the information given.
3. Highlight major crossing points along the Rio Grande.
4. Discuss challenges travelers may have faced.

### **Class Discussion: What Does Freedom Look Like Across Borders?**

Consider these questions:

1. How might crossing into Mexico have felt different from reaching Canada?
2. How would language, culture, and politics affect someone's new life?
3. Can you think of similar stories about people crossing borders today?

### **Post Lesson Journal Reflection:**

Imagine the journey of a person who escaped to Mexico. Write a journal entry about their journey. Use what you learned from today's lesson to include details.

## Teacher Facing Pre-Show Lesson Plan

Grades 9-12

<b>MEXODUS Pre-Show Lesson:</b> Setting the Historical Stage	<b>Grade Level:</b> 9-12
<b>Objective:</b> Students will explore the historical context of slavery, resistance, and the Underground Railroad, with a focus on the southern route into Mexico. They will analyze primary sources, engage with geographic data, and reflect on how the concept of freedom changes across borders.	<b>Common Core Standards:</b> <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1</b> – Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2</b> – Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.7</b> – Integrate visual information with other information in print and digital texts. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1</b> – Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.
<b>Materials Needed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Copies of selected primary sources (runaway slave ads, memoir excerpts, abolitionist writings, Mexican anti-slavery law excerpts)</li><li>• Large map of North America (physical or digital interactive map)</li><li>• Markers/sticky notes for map annotation</li><li>• Projector or smartboard for visual materials</li><li>• Journals or composition notebooks</li></ul>	
<b>Lesson:</b> <b>Warm-Up Discussion (5 min)</b> Prompt students: <i>“When we talk about the Underground Railroad, what images or routes come to mind?”</i>	

- List responses on the board. Note any assumptions about direction (northward to Canada).

### **Primary Source Analysis (15 min)**

- Divide students into small groups.
- Give each group a different source (e.g., 1829 Mexican decree abolishing slavery, narrative from a freedom seeker who traveled south, U.S. newspaper coverage).
- Guiding Questions:
  - What is the perspective of the author?
  - What does this source reveal about the risks and opportunities of escape to Mexico?
  - How might geography, politics, and culture have shaped the journey?
- Groups share findings briefly with the class.

### **Interactive Map Activity (15 min)**

- Display a large map of North America showing U.S. slave states, free states, Mexico, and Canada circa mid-1800s.
- Students plot known northern routes of the Underground Railroad, then add southern routes into Mexico based on provided information.
- Highlight major crossing points (e.g., along the Rio Grande) and discuss environmental/geopolitical challenges.

### **Class Discussion: “*What Does Freedom Look Like Across Borders?*” (10 min)**

Use prompts to connect past and present:

- How might crossing into Mexico have felt different from reaching Canada?
- What role did language, culture, and politics play in defining “freedom”?
- How do we see these ideas reflected in migration stories today?

### **Post Lesson Reflection:**

Students write a short reflection or journal entry imagining the journey of a historical figure who escaped to Mexico, drawing on facts from the lesson.

## Student Facing Pre-Show Lesson Plan

Grades 9-12

### MEXODUS Pre-Show Lesson: Setting the Historical Stage

Before attending MEXODUS, we will explore the historical context of slavery, resistance, and the Underground Railroad, including the southern route into Mexico. Through this lesson, you'll analyze primary sources, explore maps, and discuss how the meaning of freedom changes across borders.

#### Objective:

Understand the history and significance of the Underground Railroad's southern route into Mexico, and consider how geography, politics, and culture shaped freedom seekers' journeys.

#### Materials Needed:

- Pen or pencil
- Marker
- Sticky notes
- Journal or composition notebook

#### Lesson:

##### Warm-Up Discussion

Prompt:

*"When we talk about the Underground Railroad, what images or routes come to mind?"*

Write down your initial thoughts or mental images and be ready to share with the class.

##### Primary Source Analysis

In small groups, you will examine a historical document. Use these guiding questions:

6. Who created this source, and what perspective do they bring?
7. What does this source reveal about the risks and opportunities of escape to Mexico?
8. How might geography, politics, and culture have shaped the journey?

Be ready to share your group's findings.

##### Interactive Map Activity

Working as a class, we will plot routes of the Underground Railroad on a large map of North America.

5. First, plot the known northern routes to free states and Canada.
6. Next, add the southern routes into Mexico based on the historical evidence provided.
7. Highlight major crossing points along the Rio Grande and other key locations.

**Class Discussion: What Does Freedom Look Like Across Borders?**

Consider these questions:

4. How might crossing into Mexico have felt different from reaching Canada?
5. What role did language, culture, and politics play in defining “freedom”?
6. How do we see these ideas reflected in migration stories today?

**Post Lesson Journal Reflection:**

Write a short journal entry imagining the journey of a historical figure who escaped to Mexico. Incorporate facts from the lesson, including details from primary sources and the map activity.

## MEXODUS Student Viewing Guide: Active Engagement During the Show

### Objective:

Engage critically with MEXODUS in real-time by tracking characters, identifying themes, and connecting performance elements—including music and looping—to historical and contemporary contexts.

### Character & Theme Tracking Sheets

As you watch, take notes on:

- Characters/Voices: What do you know about the main characters? How are they different? What are their similarities? What are their strengths? What are their weaknesses?
- Themes: What messages or ideas keep coming up? Examples:
  - Freedom across borders
  - Resistance and resilience
  - Identity and belonging
  - Cultural exchange and solidarity
- Evidence: Write down lines, lyrics, images, or staging choices that communicate these themes.

### Key Vocabulary

Identify how these terms appear in the show.

- Freedom
- Enslaved
- Ancestors
- Justice
- Borderland
- Freedom
- Resistance
- Solidarity
- Migration
- Liberation
- Hip-Hop
- Oral History

### Music & Looping

Pay attention to how music supports the storytelling:

- Live Music: When and how is live music used? Does it set mood, underscore emotion, or highlight action?
- Looping: Notice moments when the performers record and repeat sounds or phrases in real time.
  - What layers do they add?
  - How does looping build rhythm, tension, or meaning?
  - Does it mirror the journey's repetition, obstacles, or persistence?
- Musical Themes: Are certain melodies, beats, or rhythms repeated? How do they connect to key ideas in the show?

### **Journal Prompts**

Jot quick responses in the moment; expand later if needed:

- “One moment that stayed with me was...” Why did it stand out?
- “This performance challenged my understanding of...” Explain how.
- “The music/lyrics/looping made me think about...”
- Henry asks the audience: “What are you choosing to do with the days your ancestors earned you?” Discuss your answer to this question.

## Teacher Facing Post-Show Lesson Plan

Grades 6-8

<b>MEXODUS Post-Show Discussion &amp; Writing Lesson Plan</b>	<b>Grade Level: 6-8</b>
<b>Objective:</b> Students will reflect on the performance of MEXODUS and connect its themes to present-day civic and cultural issues through collaborative discussion and creative written expression.	<b>Common Core Standards:</b> <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6-8.1</b> – Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-8.1</b> – Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-8.3</b> – Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences using effective techniques, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-8.9</b> – Draw evidence from literary or informational texts (or performances) to support analysis, reflection, and research.
<b>Materials Needed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● MEXODUS Show Programs</li><li>● Whiteboard or chart paper for discussion notes</li><li>● Pens or pencils</li><li>● Journals or composition notebooks</li></ul>	
<b>Lesson:</b> <b>Socratic Seminar (30 min)</b> Setup: Arrange chairs in a circle to encourage active listening and respectful dialogue. Review discussion	

norms (listen actively, respond respectfully, use evidence from the performance).

**Sample Questions:**

1. Which moment in MEXODUS stood out most to you? Why?
2. What did the play teach you about a part of history you may not have learned before?
3. How did the music, rhythm, and looping technology make the story feel more powerful?
4. Can you think of a modern migration or freedom story that connects to the themes in MEXODUS?

**Teacher Tip:** Keep track of who speaks to ensure balanced participation. Encourage students to back up their responses with details from the performance.

**Post Show Creative Writing Assignment:**

Students choose one of the following creative responses:

**Option A: Historical Monologue** - Write from the perspective of a person traveling south to Mexico seeking freedom. Include historical details and emotions they might have felt.

**Option B: Spoken Word or Poem** - Create a spoken word piece or poem about someone today experiencing a journey similar in courage and challenge to the ones shown in MEXODUS.

**Option C: Music & Word Fusion** - Write a rhythmic poem or rap using repetition or looping elements to answer: *“What are you choosing to do with the days your ancestors earned you?”*

**Sharing:** Students present their piece to the class or record it for a class archive.

**Exit Ticket or Journal Entry**

Have students choose to answer **one** question as an exit ticket or journal entry:

- What did you learn from MEXODUS that you didn't know before?
- How will this performance change the way you think about freedom, migration, or history?

## Student Facing Post-Show Lesson Plan

Grades 6-8

### MEXODUS Post-Show Discussion & Writing Lesson Plan

**Objective:**

1. Share your thoughts about MEXODUS.
2. Make connections between the play and the world we live in today.
3. Create your own writing inspired by the performance.

**Materials Needed:**

- MEXODUS Show Programs or your notes from the show
- Pens or pencils
- Journals or composition notebooks

**Lesson:****Socratic Seminar (Group Discussion)**

You'll join your classmates in a circle for a respectful conversation about *MEXODUS*.

**Remember to:**

- Listen carefully to others.
- Build on what your classmates say.
- Use details or moments from the show to support your ideas.

**Guiding Questions:**

1. Which moment in MEXODUS stood out most to you? Why?
2. What did the play teach you about a part of history you may not have learned before?
3. How did the music, rhythm, and looping technology make the story feel more powerful?
4. Can you think of a present-day migration or freedom story that connects to the themes in MEXODUS?

**Post Show Creative Writing Assignment:**

Choose **ONE** of these options to create your own piece inspired by the show:

**Option A: Historical Monologue** - Write as if you are a person traveling south to Mexico seeking freedom. Include what you see, hear, feel, and hope for.

**Option B: Spoken Word or Poem** - Create a spoken word piece, poem, or short story about someone today who is on a journey similar in courage and challenge to the ones shown in *MEXODUS*.

**Option C: Music & Word Fusion** - Write a rhythmic poem or rap using repetition or looping. Answer the question: "*What are you choosing to do with the days your ancestors earned you?*"

**Exit Ticket or Journal Entry**

Choose **ONE**:

- What did you learn from MEXODUS that you didn't know before?
- How will this performance change the way you think about freedom, migration, or history?

## Teacher Facing Post-Show Lesson Plan

Grades 9-12

<b>MEXODUS Post-Show Discussion &amp; Writing Lesson Plan</b>	<b>Grade Level:</b> 9-12
<b>Objective:</b> Reflect on the performance of MEXODUS and connect its themes to current civic and cultural issues through discussion and written expression.	<b>Common Core Standards:</b> <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1</b> – Engage effectively in discussions. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1</b> – Write arguments to support claims. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3</b> – Write narratives. <b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9</b> – Draw evidence from the performance for analysis.
<b>Materials Needed:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● MEXODUS Show Programs</li><li>● Pens or pencils</li><li>● Journals or composition notebooks</li></ul>	
<b>Lesson:</b> <b>Socratic Seminar (30 min)</b> Arrange students in a circle and review discussion norms. <b>Sample Questions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● What moments in MEXODUS resonated most with you, and why?</li><li>● How does MEXODUS expand our understanding of American history?</li><li>● How did the use of music and live looping deepen the story?</li></ul>	

- What parallels can you draw between the migration stories in MEXODUS and migration issues today?

**Teacher Tip:** Keep track of who speaks to ensure balanced participation. Encourage students to back up their responses with details from the performance.

**Post Show Creative Writing Assignment:**

**Option A:** Historical Monologue – Write from the perspective of someone on the journey south to Mexico.

**Option B:** Spoken Word – Create a spoken word, poem, or short story about someone today facing a journey that reflects the themes of MEXODUS.

**Option C:** Music & Word Fusion – Write a rhythmic poem or rap that incorporates looping elements, answering the question: “What are you choosing to do with the days your ancestors earned you?”

Students will present their chosen option to the class.

**Exit Ticket or Journal Entry**

Have students choose to answer **one** question as an exit ticket or journal entry:

- What did you learn from MEXODUS that you didn't know before?
- How will this performance change the way you think about freedom, migration, or history?

## Student Facing Post-Show Lesson Plan

Grades 9-12

### MEXODUS Post-Show Discussion & Writing Lesson Plan

**Objective:**

Share your thoughts on MEXODUS, make connections to the world today, and get creative.

**Materials Needed:**

- MEXODUS Show Programs
- Pens or pencils
- Journals or composition notebooks

**Lesson:****Socratic Seminar**

Join a group discussion (Socratic Seminar) about the show MEXODUS. Listen respectfully, respond to others, and use moments from the show to support your points.

**Guiding Questions:**

- What moments in MEXODUS resonated most with you, and why?
- How does MEXODUS expand our understanding of American history?
- How did the use of music and live looping deepen the story?
- What parallels can you draw between the migration stories in MEXODUS and migration issues today?

**Post Show Creative Writing Assignment:**

Get creative! Choose **one**:

**Option A: Historical Monologue** – Write from the perspective of someone on the journey south to Mexico.

**Option B: Spoken Word** – Create a spoken word, poem, or short story about someone today facing a journey that reflects the themes of MEXODUS.

**Option C: Music & Word Fusion** – Write a rhythmic poem or rap that incorporates looping elements,

answering the question: “What are you choosing to do with the days your ancestors earned you?”

Be prepared to present your chosen option to the class.

**Exit Ticket or Journal Entry**

Choose **one**:

- What did you learn from MEXODUS that you didn't know before?
- How will this performance change the way you think about freedom, migration, or history?

## Primary Sources Suggestions

### Grades 6-8

1. **"The Underground Railroad to Mexico" – West Des Moines Historical Society**
  - **Description:** This resource provides an overview of the southern route of the Underground Railroad, highlighting the abolition of slavery in Mexico and the challenges faced by freedom seekers.
  - **Access:** [wdmhs.org](http://wdmhs.org)
2. **"Freedom Seekers in the Antebellum Texas–Mexico Borderlands" – National Park Service**
  - **Description:** This article discusses the role of the Coahuila border town Piedras Negras as a site of freedom and the involvement of Black Seminoles in assisting escapees.
  - **Access:** [nps.gov](http://nps.gov)
3. **"The Underground Railroad to Canada" – New York Public Library**
  - **Description:** While focused on the northern route, this guide includes primary and secondary sources that can be compared to the southern route to Mexico.
  - **Access:** [nypl.org](http://nypl.org)

### Grades 9-12

1. **"South to Freedom: Runaway Slaves to Mexico and the Road to the Civil War" – National Archives**
  - **Description:** Historian Alice L. Baumgartner's work explores why Mexico abolished slavery and how its policies influenced the U.S. sectional crisis.
  - **Access:** [archives.gov](http://archives.gov)
2. **"The Underground Railroad Records" by William Still**
  - **Description:** This 1872 book compiles narratives of over 600 enslaved individuals who escaped via the Underground Railroad, offering firsthand accounts.
  - **Access:** [archive.org](http://archive.org)
3. **"The Little-Known History of the Underground Railroad to Mexico" – Medium**
  - **Description:** This article delves into the history of the southern route to Mexico and the role of Afro-Mexican emancipators.
  - **Access:** [medium.com](http://medium.com)

### Texas Runaway Slave Project - Grades 6-12

**Description:** This digital archive houses over 2,500 runaway slave advertisements, articles, and notices from Texas newspapers published through 1865. It offers a comprehensive view of the experiences of enslaved individuals seeking freedom via the southern route to Mexico.

**Access:** [Texas Runaway Slave Project](http://TexasRunawaySlaveProject.org)