

READING

Introducing Borders (Adapted Version)

Pre-Reading Questions

Before you start to read, take a few minutes to consider the following questions:

- What kinds of borders exist in the world? What purposes do they serve?
- How can borders be helpful? How can they be harmful?
- How can borders affect our sense of belonging in a situation or place?

Encountering Borders in Everyday Life

In our lives, we encounter many borders. These borders can influence our sense of who we are, how we interact with others, and our sense of belonging in the world. Most people think of a border as a physical boundary or a dividing line. *Beyond Borders: A Cultural Reader* offers a different and more complex way of thinking about borders:

A border can be any place where differences come together, whether these differences are national, cultural and social, differences in values or language, or differences in gender, family heritage or economic status.

We cross borders every day, such as when we travel to school, pick out clothes to wear, chat with friends online, move to a new place, or speak multiple languages. Borders are something we must all negotiate as part of our lives.

Where differences come together, people or groups are rarely on an equal footing: there is almost always an imbalance—of power, resources, capital, trust, understanding, or desire. No matter who you are, you are negotiating these borders continually, making transactions across boundaries and maneuvering among differences.¹

People on opposite sides of a border might not share the same values or beliefs, so it can be hard to find common ground. They can also have different levels of power and status, so it can be hard to reach agreements that benefit both sides equally.

¹ Young, Joy and Randall Bass *Beyond Borders: A Cultural Reader* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 2-3.

Types of Borders

Borders can be visible and tangible (*can be touched*), such as rivers and mountain ranges between two countries. For example, Mount Everest divides China and Nepal, and the Rio Grande divides parts of Mexico and the United States. Visible borders can also be made by people, like a fence between two properties or a border wall created by governments.

Borders can also be invisible and intangible. These are divisions that are not physically defined and can't be touched. For example, an invisible border might be a large wealth gap between two neighborhoods, or different social groups in a school, like the athletes, the gamers, and the fine-arts kids. Even though there are no physical barriers separating the groups, there may be invisible borders based on shared interests and characteristics. These invisible borders can influence where students sit in the cafeteria, who they invite to a group chat, or who they stand up for if they see or hear something unfair.

The Paradox of Borders: Helpful or Harmful?

Borders have had a big impact on people and societies throughout human history, often serving as a source of both safety and tension. Some people think that borders are necessary to maintain order and safety, while other people believe that borders are arbitrary and can be harmful. Thus, borders can be full of complexities and contradictions.

On the one hand, **borders can be helpful** because they allow us to create order and make the world easier to understand. They can help people feel like they belong by grouping them with others who share similar interests, values, and characteristics. In these cases, a border can create a sense of **inclusivity**, bringing people and communities together. Borders can also give groups a sense of identity and protect them from danger.

On the other hand, **borders can also be harmful.** They can stop us from connecting with other people. This can lead to prejudice, discrimination, and even conflict. A border can cause **exclusion**, making it hard for people outside of the boundary to feel accepted. A border can also be used to limit the rights of certain groups and create unfair laws. Borders can stop us from seeing new possibilities or engaging with people who may seem different from us.

Conclusion

Borders are all around us and can be both helpful and hurtful. They can help us feel like we belong and can be a source of structure and order. But borders can also lead to exclusion and discrimination between different groups. It's important to recognize the complexities

of borders and their power to both bring us together and tear us apart. Understanding this is a first step in creating spaces where everyone feels empowered and accepted, regardless of the visible and invisible borders that may exist around them.

Connection Questions

1. In your opinion, what is the most valuable idea in this reading? What makes you say that?
2. What ideas in this reading do you find challenging? In what way?
3. What are some examples of differences people may encounter on either side of a border?
4. How can people work together to challenge the power dynamics and inequalities that happen across borders?
5. What kinds of borders have the biggest influence on our sense of belonging? What makes you say that?
6. In what ways can borders be both helpful and harmful? For example, how can borders make some people feel included and others feel excluded?
7. How can we use our knowledge about borders to create spaces that allow everyone to feel included and accepted, rather than left out?