

# Writing Home: Text Choice and Latinx Representation in the ELA Classroom

Topher Kandik, E.L. Haynes, PCS  
Maya Lawrence, PEN/Faulkner  
Cristi Donoso Best, Writer-In-Residence



# Icebreaker

What is your experience with teaching Latinx authors to high school students and/or what Latinx authors did you read when you were in high school?



# Agenda

0-10: Icebreaker

11-15: Naming and Demographics at Haynes

16-25: PEN/Faulkner's Nuestras Voces

26-35: Writing Home Writer-In-Residence

36-45: Writing Home syllabus

46-60: Q and A and suggestions/comments



# Naming Note: It's Complicated

- Students whose home language is Spanish and come from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and other parts of Latin America do not agree on a single name.
- The Quality Report (on demographics slide) uses "Hispanic/Latino," but both terms are problematic.
- Hispanic, with its roots in Spanish empire and conquest, is fraught.
- Latino shows a gender preference/bias.
- Scholars often use [Latinx](#) or Latine, but my students don't really use those terms.
- I will use Latinx in this presentation, although I am not comfortable as a White teacher telling my students how to refer to themselves.



# Student Demographics - Haynes

**2012-13: 33% Students identified as Hispanic/Latino**

**2013-14: 35% Students identified as Hispanic/Latino**

**2014-15: 42% Students identified as Hispanic/Latino**

**2015-16: 45% Students identified as Hispanic/Latino**

**2016-17: 48% Students identified as Hispanic/Latino**

**2017-18: 49% Students identified as Hispanic/Latino**

**2018-19: 55% Students identified as Hispanic/Latino**

**2019-20: 58% Students identified as Hispanic/Latino**



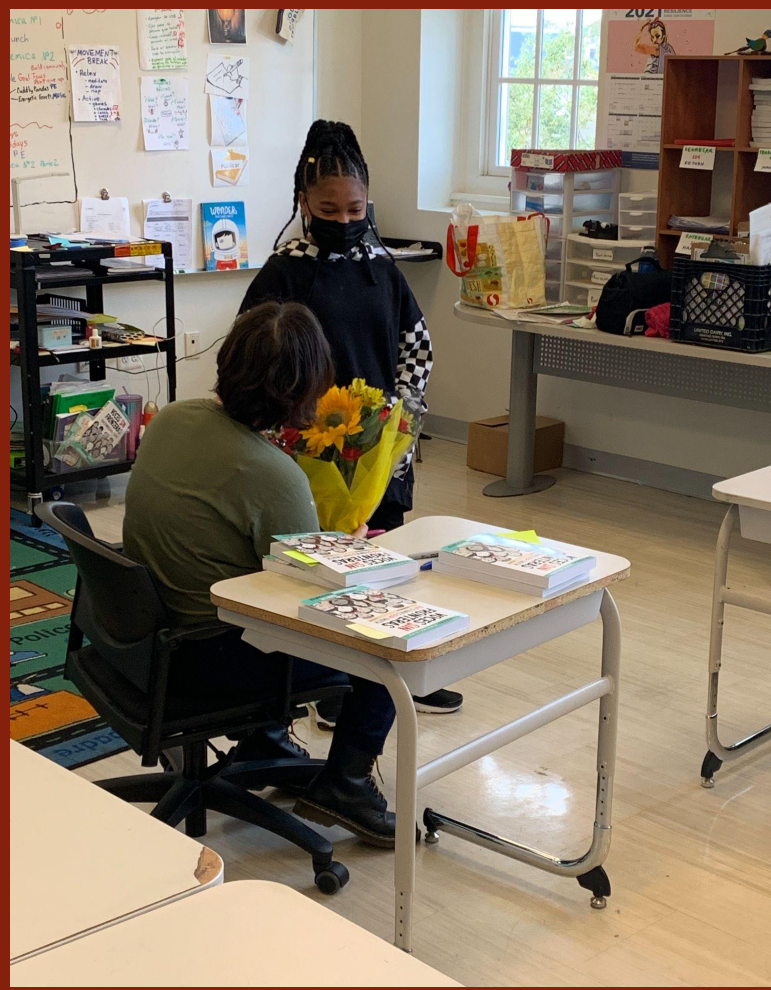
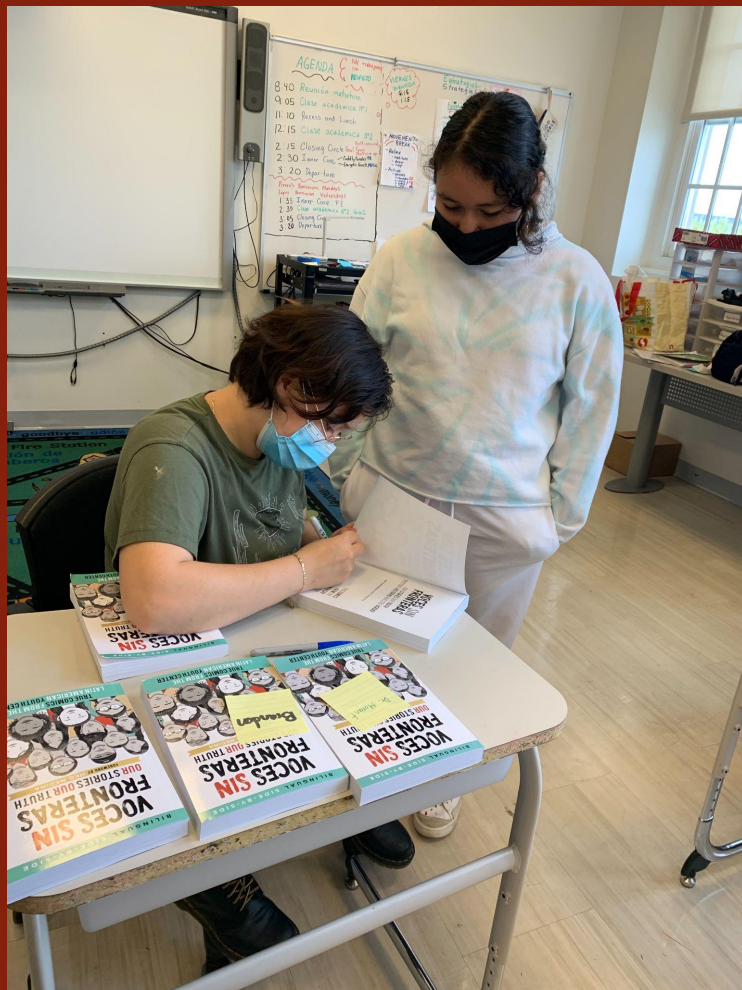
# Representation Matters

- I am a white teacher who grew up seeing myself in the books I read in English class.
- I believe my students deserve that same experience.
- David Bowles (*They Call Me Guero*), says, “Teachers who can’t offer *testimonio*, can use texts that center identities and voices like their students.” (NEH summer Borderlands workshop).
- Enter: PEN/Faulkner’s Nuestras Voces Program and Maya Lawrence

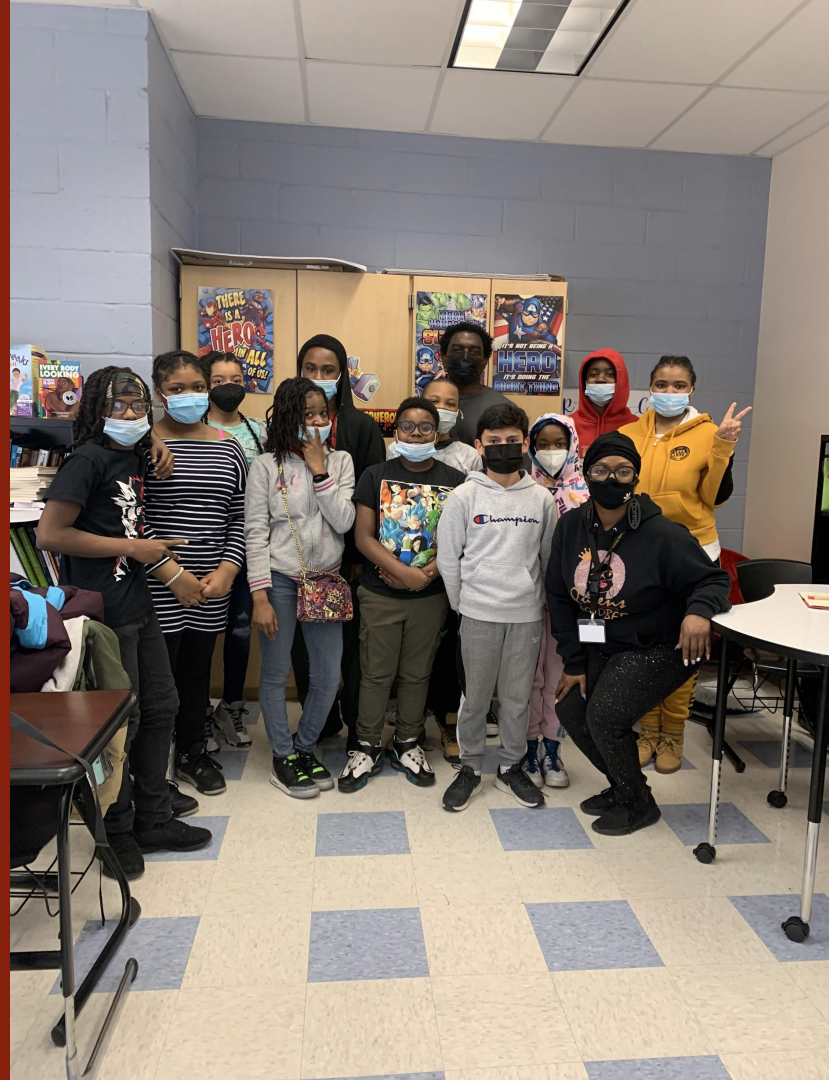


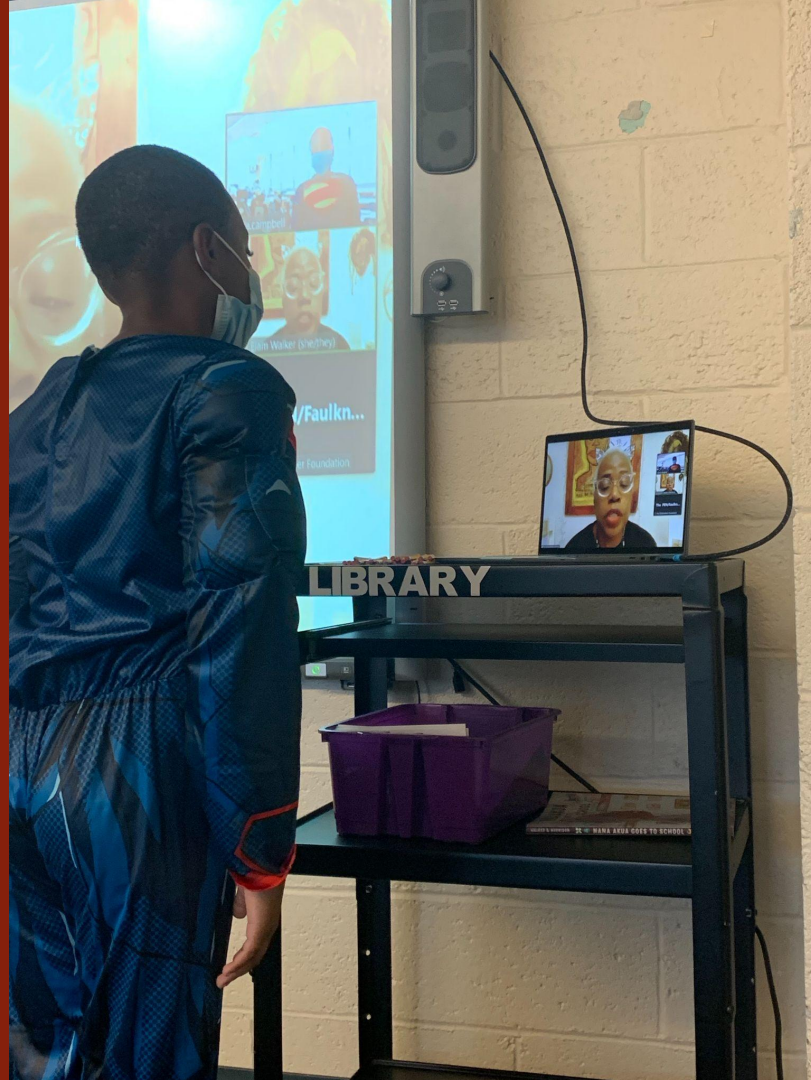
















# **Education Programs**

Maya Lawrence: Literary Education Programs  
Assistant

Lacey Dunham: Director of Education  
Programs

[lacey@penfaulkner.org](mailto:lacey@penfaulkner.org)



## **Writer-In-Residence: Cristi Donoso Best**

- In addition to the assist on bringing Latinx authors to my classroom, PEN/Faulkner also hired a Writer-In-Residence to assist in the Writing Home course.
- Cristi has been an invaluable resource this year as she works with students on publishing a book of essays.
- Cristi will share her background, experience, and perspective about her work with my Writing Home students.



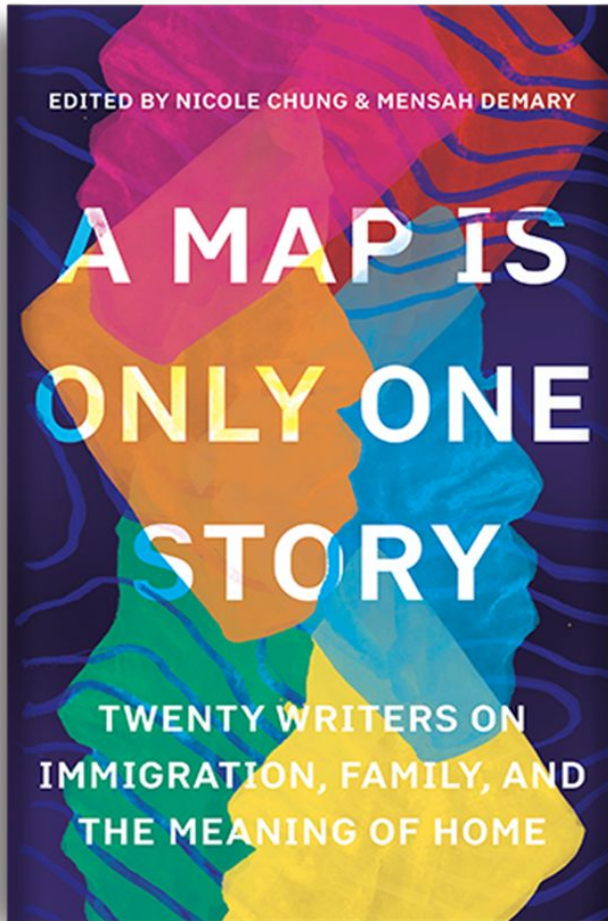


# Telling Our Own Stories

Cristi Donoso, MS, MFA

[cdonosowriter@gmail.com](mailto:cdonosowriter@gmail.com)





A map is only one story.  
It is not the most  
important story. **The  
most important story is  
the one the people tell  
about themselves.** —  
Jamila Osman

# Creative Writing Labs

- Ownership of the work
  - All languages accepted
  - Informal, non-academic language encourage
  - Writing for an audience of choice (vs. for teachers)
- Experimental focus
  - Play vs. product
  - Deviation from assignments allowed
  - Non-standard grammar and syntax allowed



# Creative Writing Process

Read model text



Discuss/break down/practice narrative strategy



Draft essay in response to open-ended prompt



# Narrative Skills Addressed

Audience

Voice

Setting

Character

Action

Scene-building

Word choice

Descriptive details

Using borrowed forms





# Anthology Project

Students:


Receive personalized feedback and guidance on selection of final piece

Revise and edit for self and peers

Make decisions about final product  
(cover, title, etc.)

A decorative graphic in the bottom right corner consisting of several overlapping triangles in shades of blue, green, and yellow.

# Special Considerations

- Creative writing work is already highly personal
  - Work around personal migration narratives can be difficult and re-traumatizing at worst
  - Students were allowed to deviate from assignment and/or request alternative assignments
  - Positive and negative narratives should receive equal welcome
- 
- A decorative graphic in the bottom right corner consisting of several overlapping triangles in shades of blue, green, and yellow.

# Next Steps

- Even with PEN/Faulkner in my corner and the talents and ideas of a Writer-In-Residence, I still needed to design/organize the class
- Much of the Latinx literature I have read and had recommended explored the idea of what “home” means to someone who may have family or home in more than one place
- I knew I wanted the curriculum to have a writing focus to take advantage of the Writer-In-Residence who will help us create our book.



# Writing Home

- *Tlahtalli* is a Nahautl word that means word or language, but it also encompasses the ideas of story, history, and discourse. An informed conversation.
- We broke the texts into 3 categories: Coming To America, Borders, and This American Life.
- This syllabus is a work-in-progress. As much as we may be tempted to write a curriculum and “have it” for the next year, I don’t think that is the best way to approach curriculum writing.
- I have a class that is evolving with my education, feedback from my students, my Latinx peers at Haynes, and from experts like you!



# Coming To America

[Drown](#), Diaz;

[Underwater Dreams](#), Dir. Mary Mazzio (2014)

[Into The Beautiful North](#), Urrea;

[Latin American Film Festival](#), selection of contemporary films by American Film Institute (this did not work out this year because...COVID);

[From Ink Know No Borders: Poems of the Immigrant and Refugee Experience](#):

Off-Island Chamorros, Craig Santos Perez; Dear America, Sholeh Wolpe;

Domesticity, Kristin Chang; Departure: July 30, 1984, Joseph O.

Legaspi; Immigrant, Lena Khalaf Tuffaha





# Borders

[Tell Me How It Ends](#), Luiselli;

[Which Way Home](#), Dir. Rebecca Cammisa (2009);

[Who Is Dayani Cristal?](#), Dir. Marc Silver (2013)

[Unaccompanied](#), Javier Zamora;



# This American Life

[\*The Undocumented Americans\*](#), Cornejo Villavincenio;

[\*My Time Among The Whites\*](#) (essays), Capo Cruet

**Small Group Lit Circles (choose one...or propose something else):**

[\*Mexican Gothic\*](#), Morena Garcia

[\*Dominicana: A Novel\*](#), Cruz

[\*Always Running\*](#), Rodriguez

[\*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao\*](#), Diaz



# Final Thoughts

Link to NEH Borderlands project: <https://sway.office.com/CQVTnSgsAMoQsOB3?ref=email>

Link to class syllabus: <https://sway.office.com/PpK3Y7XDfhkfbKfU?ref=Link>

I am really interested in your input. In order to make this class stronger and to serve our students better, your thoughts, challenges, and suggestions will be heard and integrated into future iterations of the class.

Let us know if you have any questions, comments, or concerns either now or via our contact information.



# Contact Info

Topher Kandik

[tkandik@elhaynes.org](mailto:tkandik@elhaynes.org)

@TopherTeacher

Cristi Donoso

[cdonosowriter@gmail.com](mailto:cdonosowriter@gmail.com)

Maya Lawrence

[maya@penfaulkner.org](mailto:maya@penfaulkner.org)



