

# PIER Summer Institutes 2014 Lesson Plan for Classroom Teachers

Based on the SEED Common Core of Teaching (CCT) Rubric for Effective Teaching

## **Who is Rigoberta Menchú? & the Rigoberta Menchú Controversy**

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*This lesson plan was inspired by Taylor Jardno, graduate student of Latin American Studies at Yale University.*

course: "Modern Latin America & the Caribbean" course - grade 11/12

### **Lesson (class time investments):**

1) introduction and context for assigned reading/writing activity - 1 day

2) collaboration time for generating responses to writing activity - partial to full day

assigned questions will be due at instructor's discretion

**Introduction:** Rigoberta Menchú's biography, I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala (1983) has been a lightning rod for both adoration and condemnation. After winning the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize her narrative, writ large, was considered a threat to status quo stakeholders from academia to neoconservatives, and beyond. While it is tempting to reduce this response to hysterical hyperbole this lesson is intended to contextualize the Rigoberta Menchú controversy and by extension generate lasting interest in Guatemalan history, historiography, and human rights.

**Geographic Connections:** Political, linguistic, and ethnographic geography of Guatemala and the Guatemalan highlands:

[shro1.aaas.org/projects/human\\_rights/guatemala/ceh/mos\\_en.pdf](http://shro1.aaas.org/projects/human_rights/guatemala/ceh/mos_en.pdf)

**Vocabulary:** revolution, agency, ladino, indigenous, right, left, middle class, Maya, Truth Commission, colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, exploited, land dispossession, ethnography, *testimonio*, pacification, counterinsurgency, Marxist, feminist, liberation theology, Greg Grandin, David Stoll, Edward Said, Rigoberta Menchú, Cuban Revolution, 1954 coup in Guatemala

**Content Standards:** 12.6, 12.8

**Essential Question:** What was it about Rigoberta Menchú, a Mayan woman from the remote highlands of Guatemala, that generated so much controversy? Was it the woman and the memoir, or the status quo's response? What is this controversy really about and what is at stake for our understanding of Latin American history?

**Literacy through the Content Area:** This is an assigned reading with questions. Both the reading and the questions are challenging. There should be some class time built in for collaboration and discussion in small groups after the students have completed the reading in order to begin preparing their written responses.

**Placement of Lesson within Broader Curriculum/Context:** This lesson/activity is intended to be placed near the end of an extensive unit on modern Guatemala - from the Ubico

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**Based on the SEED Common Core of Teaching (CCT) Rubric for Effective Teaching** years, the monopoly of UFCo (United Fruit Company) on Guatemalan politics and economy, through the aftermath of the 1954 coup up to the civil war, counterinsurgency, and genocide against the indigenous Maya in the highlands in the early 1980s. This lesson is meant to tie all of this history into a kind of culminating case study on the uses, and abuses, of historical narrative and contentions of revolutionary experience, counterinsurgency violence, human rights, and “historical truth.”

**Learner Background:** Students will need to be willing to explore and weigh contentious interpretations of history. They will also require having a broader grasp on the revolutionary upheavals in Central America during the Cold War.

**Objective(s) for Lesson:** 1) perform a close reading 2) analyze the reading for content and complex understanding 3) collaborate with other students 4) provide coherent and rich responses to complex and open-ended questions

**Integration of 21st century skills:** see above

**Assessment:** Mastery is not expected; engagement is. The reading and questions are so multi-layered they will be challenging to all learners. My hope is that both the reading and questions are both compelling and inviting - and raise questions about their own understanding, learning, and assumptions. Aside from question #4 there are not prescriptive “right or wrong” answers.

**Summative Assessment:** this is a rigorous reading/writing activity requiring significant time and effort and thus should weigh more heavily than typical homework assignments

### **Materials/Resources:**

reading: <http://www.thenation.com/article/154582/it-was-heaven-they-burned>

questions for “It Was Heaven That They Burned: Who is Rigoberta Menchú?” by Greg Grandin:

*Instructions: Responses must be typed, fully developed, and of course written in complete sentences*

- 1) **“A revolutionary isn’t born out of something good but of wretchedness and bitterness”** (page 4)
  - a. Explain what is a “revolutionary”
  - b. and is “wretchedness and bitterness” an adequate agency for revolutionary change and transformation? Why or why not?
- 2) What is the reasoning behind the right’s (people and groups on the right wing of the political spectrum) desire to denounce Rigoberta Menchú? What evidence does the right present against her?
- 3) **“The relationship between repression, on the one hand, and colonialism, imperialism and capitalism, on the other, is hard to deny”** (page 6) How does this quote apply to your understanding of Guatemala? What are other historical examples that support this claim?
- 4) What was the role of the *ladinos* in the Guatemalan highlands? Who are they?

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5) Read the following excerpt from the article carefully:

**Thus the broad resonance, beyond anything having to do with Guatemala, of the Menchú controversy. Guatemala has long been recognized as one of the most exploited societies in a region defined by exploitation, a place where many Mayans were subject to what was in effect slavery well into the twentieth century. The role of the United States in terminating the first and still so far only government that tried to democratize the country has been so well documented that it has become the mainstream example of choice when one wants to illustrate the misuse of Washington's power abroad. It even forced a sitting president to apologize. The catastrophe that followed the 1954 coup had staggering human costs, resulting in one of the most savage wars in twentieth-century Latin America. So, if it could be demonstrated that political violence in northern Quiché—among the poorest of regions in the poorest of departments in the poorest of countries—was caused not by land dispossession, racism or aborted reform but by, as Stoll thinks, "middle-class radicals" entranced by the Cuban Revolution, then the whole of Latin American history would be up for grabs. And indeed, by the end of his book, Stoll has parlayed discrepancies in Menchú's story into a blanket indictment of the Latin American left throughout its cold war history, attributing the rise of death-squad dictatorships in Chile, Argentina and other countries in the 1970s to the "misguided belief in the moral purity of total rejection, of refusing to compromise with the system and seeking to overthrow it by force." (page 6)**

What is meant by **“then the whole of Latin American history is up for grabs”** and what is at stake in terms of how the history of modern Latin American is presented (for example in this course)?

6) How does the CEH (United Nations Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico) support or detract from Menchú's assertions about the origins of the civil war in Guatemala?

### Lesson Development/Instructional Strategies:

- Students will have a basic understanding of modern Guatemalan history and of the conditions that led to the civil war and genocide in the early 1980s. They will have seen the 1983 documentary “When the Mountains Tremble” and therefore already have been introduced to Rigoberta Menchú, who is the primary narrator in the film.
- Students will be informed of the complexity and expectations (attenuated for differentiation) of the assigned reading/writing activity.
- In class we will read through and decode the first two pages of the reading (the article consists of ten printed pages) - this will be the bulk of the introduction to the assignment. Students will be given two days to read through and mark up the text according to a close reading protocol. They will then be given class time to discuss and collaborate in small groups on strategies for their responses to the questions.

### Students Needing Differentiated Instruction:

How will you differentiate instruction in this lesson for students you may anticipate struggling with the content/learning objectives?

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I team teach this course with an ESL teacher who will modify the reading and work closely with the students in assessing how to optimize the outcome of the activity.

How will you provide opportunities for enrichment/higher level of challenge for students?

As stated, this is challenging and difficult. It is intended to generate disequilibrium and complex discourse. Hopefully this will inspire some students to read I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala and study the wider context of related events throughout Latin America during the Cold War.

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