

# Hemispheres

## Understanding Migration

Curriculum Resources for the Classroom

Hemispheres is a partnership of:

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Center for Middle Eastern Studies  
Center for Russian, East European & Eurasian Studies  
South Asia Institute

in the College of Liberal Arts  
at the University of Texas at Austin

**Understanding Migration**  
**Curriculum Resources for the Classroom**

Final Edition  
Publication Date: September 2007

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## Student Activity: Migration from Nicaragua during the Sandinista-Contra Years

### Time needed:

1 class period (45 min.–1 hour) should be sufficient to complete the reading and T-Chart or writing prompt activities. The writing prompt may be done in class or assigned as homework. (Although the T-Chart and writing prompt activities complement each other, it is not necessary—and may be redundant—to assign both to your students.)

### Supplies for this activity:

- Map of the world (not included)
- Reading: *Migration from Nicaragua during the Sandinista-Contra Years* (p. 41)
- Either the *T-Chart: Nicaragua* worksheet (p. 42) or the *Writing Prompt: Nicaragua* worksheet (p. 43)
- Chalkboard or dry-erase board

### Preparation:

Have students identify Nicaragua on a map of the world. Compare its size to that of the United States. You may also wish to use the map on page 100 to identify the Mosquitia region mentioned in the text.

You may wish to go over the following term with your students:

- **Dictatorship:** a system of government in which absolute power is held by one person (a “dictator”).

### Class activities:

Distribute the *Migration from Nicaragua during the Sandinista-Contra Years* reading to all students. Have them read quietly.

### **Variation 1:**

Distribute the *T-Chart: Nicaragua* worksheet and have students complete the chart individually or in small groups. When finished, draw a T-Chart on the board and have each student or group offer one point and write it in the appropriate place on the board. Continue until all of the unique points offered by students are included. Discuss the results with the class. Ask students to compare the answers they gave with the answers that others gave. Are there any similarities? Are there any differences? Why? Or why not? Ask for a show of hands to determine which side the students feel has a stronger argument. Ask one or two students to explain their reasons.

### **Variation 2:**

After students have finished reading, replicate the T-Chart from the *T-Chart: Nicaragua* worksheet on the board. Complete the T-Chart by having students suggest points in favor of and in opposition to migration and write them in the appropriate column. As a follow-up to this activity, you may wish to assign the *Writing Prompt: Nicaragua* worksheet as homework or an in-class activity.

### **Variation 3:**

Assign both the *Migration from Nicaragua during the Sandinista-Contra Years* reading and the *Writing Prompt: Nicaragua* worksheet as homework. In class the next day, replicate the T-Chart from the *T-Chart: Nicaragua* worksheet on the board. Complete the T-Chart by having students suggest points in favor of and in opposition to migration and write them in the appropriate column. Continue until all of the unique points offered by students are included. Discuss the results with the class. Ask students to compare the answers they gave with the answers that others gave. Are there any similarities? Are there any differences? Why? Or why not? Ask for a show of hands to determine which side students supported in their writing, and have some of the students read the conclusion from their writing prompt out loud to the class.

## Migration from Nicaragua during the Sandinista–Contra Years

In 1979, after over four decades of the brutal Somoza dictatorship, the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front, or the Sandinistas) toppled the government. However, the country was in trouble (the economy was in ruins, food was scarce, education was weak, and medical help almost nonexistent) and the Sandinistas were soon fighting a guerrilla war launched by U.S.-backed *Contras*, or counterrevolutionaries. The new government faced numerous problems. Many Nicaraguans left their country, seeking peace and stability in other nations.

I live in Jinotega, a small city in northern Nicaragua. Five years ago, when the Sandinistas took over the government and got rid of the terrible Somozas who had ruled us for so long, my family was very happy. The Sandinistas promised that we would have free elections for the first time in 40 years.

But the situation in Nicaragua was not good. During the revolution, 50,000 people were killed and 500,000 people lost their homes. Farmland was destroyed during the fighting and so there wasn't much food. After the fighting stopped, it was hard to get back to normal life. There had been so much destruction and the new government didn't have the money to rebuild our country.

To make things worse, we are still at war—with the *Contras*, who are trying to get rid of the Sandinistas. Innocent people die every day. Recently, a truck on its way to Jinotega was blown up by the *Contras*: 11 people were killed and 33 were seriously hurt. I'm afraid to stay here, afraid that someone in my family will be hurt. And all men over 16 have to join the army—if we stay, I'll be forced to join next year.

The United States has declared an embargo on Nicaragua because of our government—this means that we can't trade or do business with each other. This has hurt us because the U.S. was our biggest trading partner. Now we have a hard time getting supplies like food, and we also have less money than ever before.

I have an uncle who moved to Miami at the beginning of the war. He is living there illegally, because he only got a visa to stay for three months, but he is happy because he has a job and a good place to live. My family might go to Miami, too. That way we'll be safe.

I live in Managua, the capital of Nicaragua. Even though the revolution was hard, my family supported the Sandinistas. The awful Somozas were gone, and the Sandinistas represented all the things that we wanted for Nicaragua: education, equality, democracy.

One of the first things the new government did was start a National Literacy Campaign. My sister volunteered to help teach people all over the country to read. We've just learned that our literacy rate rose from 45% to 86%. We are very proud of my sister for having participated in this project.

The Sandinistas also pledged to help distribute money more equally. They took control of land that the Somoza family had owned. My father read in the newspaper that the family owned 168 factories—25% of the factories in Nicaragua! It's amazing how much money they controlled. Now money and land are being distributed to more people. Small groups of farmers are given plots of land to start community farms. Wealth is being shared instead of concentrated in the hands of a few people.

Because of the continuing war with the *Contras*, lots of people are leaving Nicaragua. They think they will be safer and better off in Costa Rica or the United States. The problem is that many are entering other countries illegally and have to work in low-paying jobs. Their lives are still hard.

My father says it's important to stay in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas aren't perfect, and we need to be here to remind them of what they promised us. We need to rebuild our country. It's important to stay and try to make a better Nicaragua, even if you don't agree with everything the Sandinistas are doing. We've gotten rid of our terrible dictators—now it's time to move forward!

**Embargo:** an official order forbidding something, usually trade with another country.

**Literacy:** the ability to read and write; a literacy campaign is a program to help people learn how to read and write.

## T-CHART: NICARAGUA

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

**Assignment:** Read the passages on *Migration from Nicaragua during the Sandinista–Contra Years*. Then complete the chart below, listing reasons why Nicaraguans might have wanted to leave their country in the left column, and reasons why Nicaraguans might have wanted to stay in the right column. Think about the political, economic, and security reasons why people would stay or go.

Make as many points as you need for each side. The first three are already labeled for you.

Reasons why Nicaraguans should have left during the Sandinista years	Reasons why Nicaraguans should have stayed during the Sandinista years
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Which side do you agree with? Cite examples from the text to support your answer:



# About Hemispheres

Created in 1996, Hemispheres is the international outreach consortium at the University of Texas at Austin. Hemispheres utilizes University resources to promote and assist with world studies education for K–12 and postsecondary schools, businesses, civic and non-profit organizations, the media, governmental agencies, and the general public.

Comprised of UT's four federally funded National Resource Centers (NRCs) dedicated to the study and teaching of Latin America; the Middle East; Russia, East Europe & Eurasia; and South Asia, Hemispheres offers a variety of free and low-cost services to these groups and more. Each center coordinates its own outreach programming, including management of its lending library, speakers bureau, public lectures, and conferences, all of which are reinforced by collaborative promotion of our resources to an ever-widening audience in the educational community and beyond.

Hemispheres fulfills its mission through: coordination of pre-service and in-service training and resource workshops for educators; promotion of outreach resources and activities via exhibits at appropriate state- and nation-wide educator conferences; participation in public outreach events as organized by the consortium as well as by other organizations; and consultation on appropriate methods for implementing world studies content in school, business, and community initiatives.

For more information, visit the Hemispheres Web site at:  
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