Teaching *Lost Children Archive* in Wisconsin
A Guide for Educators

2023–2024 Great World Texts Program
UW-Madison Center for the Humanities

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The University of Wisconsin–Madison occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, a place their nation has called Teejop (day-JOPE) since time immemorial.

In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory.

Decades of ethnic cleansing followed when both the federal and state government repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, sought to forcibly remove the Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin.

This history of colonization informs our shared future of collaboration and innovation.

Today, UW–Madison respects the inherent sovereignty of the Ho-Chunk Nation, along with the eleven other First Nations of Wisconsin.
INTRODUCTION

Some content of this introduction, especially the terminology on sovereign peoples, was adapted from *Teaching There There in Wisconsin (2023)*, written by Addie Hopes. Teachers are encouraged to consult the curriculum guide created by Hopes (in the link provided above) for more in-depth resources, reading lists, etc. about the topic.

READING THROUGH TIME AND PLACE

*Lost Children Archive* is a work of fiction. While a novel can help us to teach culture, history, politics, and so on, no single piece of literature can bear the burden of representing an entire nation, culture, people, or socio-political landscape. Valeria Luiselli offers a particular perspective on the world and invites us to question, empathize, and delve into the depths of the human experience. Through the lens of this novel, readers can reflect on repetitive cycles of political violence towards communities that the US considers outsiders and explore the complexities of forced displacement, migration, the legacy of colonialism, human rights, and the resilience of those seeking a better life. Nevertheless, this literary work represents just one voice among many in the ongoing conversations that are taking place in this country about identity, race, social justice, and the human condition. As such, this text inspires us to learn more, seek diverse perspectives, and engage in constructive dialogues beyond its pages. While we hope you and your students will enjoy the text’s ability to speak across time and place, we also encourage you to consider the socio-historical and cultural conditions that make these characters’ experiences and perspectives unique. Certain sections of the teaching guide, such as Units 1 through 4, will be especially helpful in this regard. As we navigate the chapters of *Lost Children Archive*, we will consider its historical context and sociopolitical implications to gain in-depth knowledge and reflect on the author’s message and the power of storytelling. Our journey through this manual is an invitation to explore, learn, and connect with one another.
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The material in this guide is intended to provide a variety of approaches for teaching Valeria Luiselli’s novel and its many contexts. We believe that the historical and cultural background is necessary for understanding this work and the questions it provokes. We also encourage you to teach the text thematically, tying it to related disciplinary issues and regular core curriculum features wherever possible.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

The recommended readings in the guide are intended for teachers, but some are also accessible to students. These readings provide further information for instructors as well as a variety of materials that might aid instructors in creating handouts and supplementing class discussion.

DISCUSSION TOPICS, ASSIGNMENTS, & ACTIVITIES

The discussion topics, assignments, and activities provided in this guide are tailored to fit into how you teach the text in your own course, as well as your time constraints, interests, and goals. The individual units might be taught over one or several days or over the span of a few weeks. You can mix and match ideas from the various sections to create your own syllabus. Each unit is organized according to themes that include points for lecture and discussion, suggestions for close reading, specific quotes from the text or other readings, as well as in-class activities and assignments that might be used to further discussion.

CLOSE READING STRATEGIES

The guide assumes that you will have read the entire text. The units also offer suggestions for specific passages within the text that would benefit from careful and attentive reading, analysis, and discussion. During class discussions and for assignments, students should be encouraged to support their interpretations with evidence from the text. Close reading lends itself well to both large-group work and small-group discussions, and it is an excellent way for students to develop their critical thinking skills as they make connections, use textual evidence to support their views and discuss the impact of various literary techniques. For close reading to work successfully, it’s important that the teacher always reminds the students to point to the
passage, line, or occurrence that supports their position when they're sharing their ideas. Close reading teaches students the difference between “opinion” or “personal reaction” and “analysis.” It also allows students to assess the text on its own merits without essentializing the cultural components of the text or stereotyping based on generalizations. Teachers are encouraged to refer to Unit 6 for further information on close reading strategies.

RECOMMENDED SOURCES & AND READINGS ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

- Amnesty International USA.
- American Immigration Council.

• International Organization for Migration (IOM).


• Migration Policy Institute.


• United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).


A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

This guide employs a variety of terms that might confuse unfamiliar students, and we encourage educators to describe them briefly.

• Asylum-seekers: An asylum-seeker is someone who has left their country and is seeking protection from persecution and serious human rights violations in another country but who hasn’t yet been legally recognized as a refugee and is waiting to receive a decision on their
asylum claim. Seeking asylum is a human right protected by international law. This means everyone should be allowed to enter another country to seek asylum.

- **Refugees**: Refugees are defined and protected by international law. The *1951 United Nations Refugee Convention* is a legal document that defines a refugee as: “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” Refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country. They often have had to leave with little more than the clothes on their back, leaving behind homes, possessions, jobs, and loved ones.

- **Migrant**: A migrant is someone who stays outside their country of origin. Some migrants leave their country by their own free will because they want to work, study, or join family members abroad. Others feel forced to leave because of poverty, political unrest, gang violence, natural disasters, or other serious circumstances.

- ** Illegal vs. Undocumented Migrant**: Words matter and shape people’s perceptions, especially when discussing a sensitive topic such as migration. It is important to note that there is no such thing as an “illegal” person and calling a certain group of people “illegal” denies them their humanity. “Illegality” as a form of migratory status has been assigned to undocumented migrants to justify a category of people who are undeserving of rights. Moreover, referring to a person as an “illegal immigrant” connotes false criminality: being present in the US without proper documents is a civil offense, not a criminal one. Many immigrant rights and advocacy groups support a language that is non-discriminatory and favor the use of more inclusive terms, such as “undocumented,” “non-citizens,” “without status,” “unauthorized,” or “unlawfully present.”

- **Forced displacement**: The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defines forced displacement as the displacement that happens “as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence or human rights violations.” Forced displacement, also known as forced migration or forced relocation, is an involuntary or coerced movement of a person or people away from their home or home region. A forcefully displaced person may be
referred to as a “forced migrant,” a “displaced person,” or, if displaced within the home country, an “internally displaced person.”

- **Colonialism:** Colonialism is the amalgamation of territorial, juridical, cultural, linguistic, political, mental/epistemic, and/or economic control exercised by one or multiple groups over another (external) group of people. It represents the exertion of power and dominance of one nation over another, involving the acquisition or retention of complete or partial political authority over a sovereign nation. The nation or country subjected to the governance of another foreign nation is referred to as a colony of the dominant country.

- **Imperialism:** Imperialism can be described as a set of beliefs, political approaches, practices, state policies, or advocacies that revolve around expanding power through territorial acquisition or extending political and economic control over external regions. It often entails the application of military and economic force and perpetually seeks further expansion and domination, whether on a collective or individual level.

- **Transculturation:** Transculturation (transculturación in Spanish) is a term coined by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in his canonical essay “Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar” (1940)—in English version “Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar” (1995). Transculturation is the phenomenon that takes place with the merging or converging of different cultural elements. It involves a two or more-way exchange of cultural influences, layering upon each other in complex power, loss, and production processes. As such, it describes a new cultural phenomenon that is the result of the blending of cultures.

- **Sovereignty:** Although its meaning and connotation have changed throughout history, and it is a controversial term in political sciences and international law, sovereignty is a concept that refers to dominant power or supreme authority. It is the right of a nation or group of people to be self-governing and be free from external control. Indigenous peoples in the United States also possess a form of divided sovereignty that resembles that held by states, counties, and cities that have changed over time with different laws and treaty rights.

- **Indigenous peoples:** This is an inclusive term that refers to any sovereign peoples inhabiting a place before colonialization. It can be used to refer to Indigenous peoples anywhere in the world, so it often helpful to be specific (e.g., the Indigenous peoples of the US; the Indigenous peoples of Canada, etc.). Because this guide is limited to the US context, the
terms “Indigenous” and “Indigenous peoples” are often used to refer to peoples living in the territory now known as the US (Hopes 6, There There Guide).

- **Native American**: This is perhaps the most familiar term to refer to the sovereign peoples who have inhabited this continent since long before European colonization. Some people do not like this term because it ties Native identity too closely to the US nation state. Still, it is widely accepted and often used in both this guide and the sources this guide recommends. That said, it is important for students to remember that this umbrella term does not describe a monolithic people; it is a single term that groups together hundreds of distinct tribal nations and cultures (Hopes 6, There There Guide).

- **American Indian**: In US law “American Indian” refers generally to the Indigenous peoples living on the continent at the time of European colonization. For many people, the word “Indian” puts too much focus on the painful legacy of colonization, as it was originally popularized by Christopher Columbus and his mistaken belief that he had reached the shores of South Asia. It is an important legal term, however, and it appears often throughout this guide when referring to US government policies, laws, and acts (Hopes 6, There There Guide).

Tips for referencing the sovereign peoples who have inhabited this continent from time immemorial (Hopes 7, There There Guide):

- Students should feel free to use the term in the source itself.
- When in doubt, non-Indigenous students should be encouraged to choose the most respectful term (for example: Indigenous peoples or Native American peoples rather than “Indians”).
- Whenever possible and relevant, it is best to use specific tribe names. This will help to remind students that each of the terms above refers not to a single group but to many diverse and heterogenous peoples.
TEACHING THE NOVEL WITH CARE

Teaching *Lost Children Archive* promises to be an enriching and exciting experience. Given the sensitive nature of the topics the book addresses, however, it is important to proceed with care. Non-Indigenous and non-migrant educators should also be aware that immigrant and Indigenous students might find it difficult to address these potentially triggering topics in the classroom environment. Immigrant and Indigenous students should never be called upon to speak as the representative of all immigrant groups or Indigenous peoples, nor should they be singled out to share their experiences or to compare their experiences with those fictionalized in the novel.

TEACHING TOWARD THE STUDENT CONFERENCE

Schools participating in the 2023–2024 program will bring students to the University of Wisconsin-Madison on Monday, April 15, 2024, to present their work to their peers and meet the author Valeria Luiselli in person.

Unit 7 in this guide is explicitly devoted to preparing students for a successful conference by encouraging them to challenge themselves with projects that provide critical interpretations of the text in unique and complex ways. There is no limit to the type of project they might prepare. Past projects have included essays, painting, sculpture, weaving, photography, film and other multimedia, dramatic performances, song, dance, and more. The only requirement is that the students’ projects present a critical text analysis.

Students will be required to write a short summary of their projects, which will be submitted to the Great World Texts Program Coordinator (greattexts@humanities.wisc.edu) approximately three weeks before the student conference. Each school will select one student, or group of students, whose work is exemplary, to present to the entire conference. It’s recommended that the students themselves select (by voting) the “best” project for this presentation, which will be no more than 3 minutes long.

It is our expectation that these presentations will be polished, rehearsed, and timed and that they will provide an opportunity for your school to feel pride and investment in its participation in the program. All other students are expected to present their work in poster sessions during the conference and will have the opportunity to stand next to their projects and
answer questions about them from other students and conference participants. Every student who attends the conference should present their work at the conference.

**A Note on Embedded Links**

You may notice throughout this guide that recommended readings and other sources contain embedded links. These links are available in the digital version of this guide, which can be found on the UW-Madison Center for the Humanities webpage [humanities.wisc.edu].
LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (MINI UNIT)

Lost Children Archive serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of recognizing ancestral lands and the impact of colonization and westward expansion on indigenous communities. The novel takes place on a cross-country road trip through the US, unfolding narratives that uncover the historical and contemporary significance of the landscapes the characters traverse. By acknowledging this reality, readers are invited to engage in a dialogue about imperialism, human rights, and the importance of preserving Native American cultural heritage.

Below is the land acknowledgment for each of the key places the family visits in the novel, as well as the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Recognizing ancestral land is an expression of gratitude and appreciation to those whose territory we reside on and a way of honoring the Indigenous people who have been living and caring for the land since ancient times. It implies acknowledging that the horrors of genocide and colonization are ongoing and that we must work against this historical erasure. Additionally, this guidebook intends to recognize the rights of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination as well as the commitment to raising Indigenous voices while being better listeners, learners, and partners. However, it is important to note this acknowledgment is only a meaningful first step when combined with accountable relationships and informed actions.

RESOURCES ON LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Bureau of Indian Affairs Map.
- Census Bureau, “My Tribal Area.”
- Native Land Digital
  --. “Interactive Map.”
  --. “Territory Acknowledgement.”


**WISCONSIN**

Wisconsin is home to eleven federally recognized tribes: the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, Ho-Chunk Nation, the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin, the Oneida Nation, the Forest County Potawatomi, the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, the St. Croix Chippewa, the Sokaogon Chippewa (Mole Lake), and the Stockbridge-Munsee, in addition to other, non-federally-recognized tribes.

The University of Wisconsin–Madison occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, a place their nation has called Teejop (day-JOPE) since time immemorial. In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory. Decades of ethnic cleansing followed when both the federal and state government repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, sought to remove the Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin forcibly. This history of colonization informs our shared future of collaboration and innovation. Today, UW-Madison respects the inherent sovereignty of the Ho-Chunk Nation, along with the eleven other First Nations of Wisconsin.

**NEW YORK**

Human beings have been present in New York since the end of the last ice age, approximately 12,000 years ago, when people followed retreating glaciers to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the newly opened landscapes. These people, the original occupants of New York, interacted with one another and ultimately with Dutch, British, French, and American settlers. Today the state of NY occupies the land of the following Nations: Abenaki, Cayuga, Erie, Laurentian, Mohawk, Mohican, Mohegan, Munsee, Oneida Indians, Onondaga, Poospatuck/Unkechaug, and Seneca. Other First Nations were also located within NY state or surrounding states that hold ties to the area, such as the Oklahoma, the Ramapough Lenape, the Montaukett, or the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of the Mohican Nation of Wisconsin.
VIRGINIA

Native American people have lived in the area now known as Virginia for thousands of years. Their histories, ancestral connections, and traditions are intertwined with the 6,000 square miles of Tidewater land the Algonquian-speaking called Tsenacomoco. The original inhabitants were hunter-gatherers who followed the migratory patterns of animals. Over time, they settled into towns along riverbanks and outlined their homelands, developing intimate, balanced relationships with the animals, plants, and geographic formations.

Today Virginia has seven federally recognized tribes: the Chickahominy Indian Tribe, the Chickahominy Indian Tribe Eastern Division, the Monacan Indian Nation, the Nansemond Indian Nation, the Pamunkey Indian Tribe, the Rappahannock Indian Tribe, and the Upper Mattaponi Indian Tribe. The state also granted recognition to the Mattaponi, the Cheroenhaka, the Nottoway of Virginia, and the Patawomeck tribes.

NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina has the largest American Indian population east of the Mississippi River and the eighth-largest Indian population in the United States. There are eight state-recognized tribes located in the state: the Coharie, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, the Haliwa-Saponi, the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, the Meherrin, the Saponi, the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation and the Waccamaw Siouan. The Eastern Band of Cherokee is fully recognized by the federal government and the Lumbee tribe has partial federal recognition after the Lumbee Act of 1956.

TENNESSEE

Because there are no reservations in Tennessee, there has been no state or federal recognition of the Indian population and no services directed to them. However, the history of the state is shaped by the presence of various groups of Indigenous people who inhabited the region for thousands of years, starting around 12,000 years ago. In fact, the name “Tennessee” originates from the Cherokee word “Tanasi.” Currently, the unrecognized First Nations in the state are the Chikamaka Cherokees and the Etowah Cherokees.

The original inhabitants of the now-Tennessee area included: the Cherokee, the Chickasaw, the Creek, the Koasati, the Quapaw, the Shawnee, and the Yuchi. Historically, the
Chickasaws claimed most of western Tennessee as their hunting grounds and the Cherokees claimed southeastern Tennessee and northeast Georgia as their homeland. By 1818, the Chickasaws had ceded their land away by treaty to the State of Tennessee.

**ARKANSAS**

The name “Arkansas” comes from the Siouan Indian word “Acansa,” which refers to a major Quapaw village in southeastern Arkansas. Historians and archeologists estimate that Native Americans have inhabited the land that now comprises the state of Arkansas for almost 14,000 years. The original inhabitants of the land that is nowadays Arkansas included: the Caddo, the Chickasaw, the Osage, the Quapaw, and the Tunica. Additionally, the Cherokee were driven into what is now Arkansas after the arrival of Europeans. Although they were forcibly moved west by 1840, many people in today’s Arkansas are still Cherokee descent.

**OKLAHOMA**

There are 38 federally recognized first Nations located in the State of Oklahoma, including fourteen within in the Northern District of Oklahoma: the Cherokee Nation, the Delaware Tribe of Indians, the Shawnee Tribe, the Eastern Shawnee Tribe of Oklahoma, the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, the Modoc Tribe of Oklahoma, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, the Osage Tribe, the Ottawa Tribe of Oklahoma, the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, the Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma, the Quapaw Tribe of Indians, the Seneca-Cayuga Tribe of Oklahoma, and the Wyandotte Nation. Nevertheless, only five tribes are considered indigenous to the region: the Osage, the Caddo, the Kiowa, the Comanche, and the Wichita.

Present-day Oklahoma was the final stop of the infamous Trail of Tears, the deadly route Native Americans were mandated to follow when the federal government made them leave their ancestral homes and walk hundreds of miles to a specially designated “Indian Territory” across the Mississippi River. After President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act (1830), the federal government had the power to grant unsettled lands west of the Mississippi in exchange for Native-held land within existing state borders. Although the law required the government to negotiate removal treaties fairly, voluntarily, and peacefully, in practice, the authorities ignored these requirements and coerced or forced communities to vacate their homelands.
In 1831, under threat of invasion by the US Army, the Choctaw—originally from Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida—became the first original Nation to be expelled from their land. They made the journey to “Indian Territory” by foot, without any food or supplies. Most of the people did not survive the trip. The forced removal process continued, and other First Nations were dispossessed of their land. By the end of the decade, very few Native American people remained in the southeastern United States.

**TEXAS**

The name “Texas” comes from the Caddoan Indian word “Taysha,” which means “friends.” However, the Caddo were not the only native people of this region. The original inhabitants of the area we call Texas at present include the Apache, the Bidai, the Coahuiltecan and Carrizo, the Caddo, the Comanche, the Jumano, Suma, Piro, and other eastern Pueblos, the Karankawa, the Kiowa, the Kitsai, the Tawakoni, the Tonkawa, and the Wichita. Additionally, numerous other groups entered East Texas in the early 19th century as refugees from the east of the Mississippi, including the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Kickapoo, and Shawnee.

In 2023, there are three federally recognized First Nations in Texas: the Alabama-Coushatta, Kickapoo, and Ysleta del Sur Pueblo.

**NEW MEXICO**

There are 23 Native American tribes located in what we now know as New Mexico: nineteen Pueblo tribes, three Apache tribes (the Fort Sill Apache Tribe, the Jicarilla Apache Nation, and the Mescalero Apache Tribe), the Navajo Nation, and a considerable urban population which are also served by the Indian Affairs Department. The nineteen Pueblo tribes are comprised of the Pueblos of Acoma, Cochiti, Isleta, Jemez, Laguna, Nambe, Ohkay Owingeh, Picuris, Pojoaque, Sandia, San Felipe, San Ildefonso, Santa Ana, Santa Clara, Santo Domingo, Taos, Tesuque, Zuni, and Zia. Each group is a sovereign nation with its own government, ways of life, traditions, and culture and has a unique relationship with the federal and state governments.
ARIZONA

Today, Arizona is home to 22 federally-recognized tribes: the Ak-Chin Indian Community, the Cocopah Indian Tribe, the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, the Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, the Fort Yuma Quechan Tribe, the Gila River Indian Community, the Havasupai Tribe, the Hopi Tribe, the Hualapai Tribe, the Kaibab Band of Paiute Indians, the Navajo Nation, the Pascua Yaqui Tribe, the Pueblo of Zuni, the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, the San Carlos Apache Tribe, the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe, the Tohono O’odham Nation, the Tonto Apache Tribe, the White Mountain Apache Tribe, the Yavapai-Apache Tribe, and the Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe.

Other out-of-state tribes with ancestral land claims in Arizona include: the Chemehuevi Tribe (California), the Fort Sill (Chiricahua) Apache Tribe (Oklahoma), the Mescalero (Chiricahua) Apache Tribe (New Mexico), the Moapa Band of Paiute Indians (Nevada), the Paiute Indian Tribe of Las Vegas (Nevada), the Paiute Indian Tribe (Utah), and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe (Colorado).

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

- In what context do you normally hear or read about land acknowledgments?
- Native American communities have endured centuries of genocidal atrocities, the confiscation of their land and resources, forced removal, practices of family separation, and the elimination of their own sovereignty. Moreover, Indigenous peoples were subject to an imposed assimilation that suppressed their languages, cultural values, and spiritual traditions practices. Explore how has the erosion of Native American sovereignty has been historically linked to actions such as the Indian Removal Act and the “Trail of Tears.” How do these events exemplify the broader theme of colonial dispossession and forced assimilation?
- Analyze how *Lost Children Archive* portrays the ongoing struggle for Native American sovereignty and self-governance in the face of historical and contemporary forms of dispossession, racism, and violence? Do you think the characters’ experiences reflect the challenges to their sovereignty and cultural continuity?
• Valeria Luiselli’s novel takes place in various states that are home to a variety of Indigenous communities. How does the acknowledgment of different tribes and Nations in each state add depth to the narrative and illuminate the rich history of Native American people in these areas?

• How does Lost Children Archive invite readers to reconsider their own relationship with the land they inhabit? Reflect on the connections between place, history, and our sense of belonging in the world. Consider the responsibility of individuals, educational institutions like the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and society in honoring Native American sovereignty and working toward reconciliation. How can we take meaningful and accountable actions to support Indigenous communities and address past injustices?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

• Map Exploration: Divide the class into small groups, give students a map of the United States, and mark the key places the family visits in Lost Children Archive. Assign each group one of these locations and ask them to research and present information about some Native American tribes that occupied the area. Have them also discuss the historical significance of these places in connection with forced removals.

• Letter Writing Campaign: Engage the class in a letter-writing campaign to raise awareness about Indigenous sovereignty and the importance of land acknowledgment. Each student can write a letter to local government officials, educational institutions, or media outlets explaining the significance of the land acknowledgment and urging them to include it in their practices and policies.
  o Another variation of this activity could be asking students to write a 400–500-word essay reflecting on what type of accountable relationships and informed actions can be taken to go one step further in the commitment, respect, and alliance toward Indigenous communities and their self-determination.
Close-Reading Exercise:

Circulate copies of this fragment to students and ask them to read it, individually or in groups, paying attention to form and content. While reading, have students circle keywords and underline the text’s main ideas.

It was 1830, he begins to tell the children as we stand in line at a Dunkin’ Donuts in Lawton the next morning. Andrew Jackson was the president of the United States at the time, and he passed an act in Congress called the Indian Removal Act. We get back in the car with donuts, coffees, and milks, and I study our map of Oklahoma, looking for the roads to Fort Still, where Geronimo and the rest of his people are buried. The Fort Still cemetery for prisoners of war should be about half an hour’s drive from where we are.

Geronimo and his band were the last men to surrender to the white-eyes and their Indian Removal Act, my husband tells the children. I don’t interrupt his story to say so out loud, but the word “removal” is still used today as a euphemism for “deportation.” I read somewhere, though I don’t remember where, that removal is to deportation what sex is to rape. When an “illegal” immigrant is deported nowadays, he or she is, in written history, “removed.” I take my recorder from the glove compartment and start recording my husband without him noticing. His stories are not directly linked to the piece I’m working on, but the more I listen to the stories he tells about this country’s past, the more it seems like he’s talking about the present. (Luiselli 133, LCA)
Suggested Discussion Questions for Previous Passage:

- What was the Indian Removal Act and its consequences for Native American communities?
- How does the narrator connect “removal” to “deportation”? What does the narrator imply when she makes the comparison between sex and rape?
- How does the husband’s storytelling about the past relate to the present, as described by the narrator?
- In what piece is the woman working? Why does she think listening to her husband’s stories can help her with it?
- Do you think the act of recording her husband’s stories reflects the narrator’s feelings about the importance of preserving history and memory? Explain why you believe so or why not.
- What significance does Fort Sill hold in the context of the quote? And in the novel? Why is the family interested in visiting this location?
- How does this text contribute to the reader’s understanding of the larger narrative of imperialism, human rights, and preserving the cultural heritage portrayed by Lost Children Archive?

UNIT ACTIVITIES AND PROJECT IDEAS

- Alternative Perspectives: By approaching the Indian Removal Act from the perspective of Indigenous people, this activity intends to help students gain a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of the historical event and its enduring impact.
  - Assign students to research sources related to the Indian Removal Act from the perspective of Native American people. These sources could include history books, personal accounts, oral histories, letters, speeches, artwork, songs, etc.
  - Ask them to consider the emotions, experiences, and viewpoints conveyed in the pieces they researched, focusing on what they reveal about the impact of the Indian Removal Act on Indigenous communities.
Have students to put themselves in the shoes of Indigenous peoples during this period by answering the following questions:

▪ How would they feel about being forcibly removed from their ancestral lands?
▪ What challenges and hardships would they face?
▪ How might their cultural identity and way of life be affected?

Finally, ask the class to work individually or in groups, exploring the Indian Removal Act from the perspective of Native American people in a creative way:

• Write a first-person narrative or diary entry from the perspective of an Indigenous individual affected by the Indian Removal Act.
  o Create a piece of artwork (such as a painting, drawing, or collage) that reflects the emotions and experiences of Indigenous people during the removal.
  o Compose a song, poem, or spoken-word piece that captures the resilience and resistance of Indigenous communities in the face of the Act.
  o In the end, teachers can conclude the activity with a group discussion where students share their work, discuss the challenges of accessing Indigenous voices in historical records, and reflect on the importance of amplifying their point of view of the events.

These are some ideas for websites where students can find primary sources:

a) Library of Congress
b) American Antiquarian Society
c) Docs Teach
d) Digital History

• Erasure Poem—this activity was created by Addie Hopes for Teaching There There in Wisconsin (2023), pgs. 25-26:
  o Create a blackout or an erasure poem using a relevant source text (i.e., a historical document such as the Indian Removal Act, the Indian Relocation Act, a textbook page that depicts Native Americans as “disappearing Indians,” a script from a film scene or commercial that relies on Native stereotypes, etc.). Using white out, a
black marker, colored markers, or cut-up images, write a new poem from the existing text by selecting certain words and obscuring the rest. In this project, students experiment with a creative form that allows student/poets to speak back to (and against) the source text, critiquing its assumptions, highlighting its distortions and fabrications, and/or allowing a hidden counter narrative to emerge from within the master narrative.

- Keep in mind that an erasure poem uses white-out to erase parts of the source text or scissors to cut away the source text. It is a method that hopes to scrape away or obliterate (erase) the source text and its legacy, and it might offer a commentary on themes such as elimination or disappearance. In a blackout poem, the ghost of the original text lingers on the document, even though it has been blacked out to allow other meanings (and counter narratives) to surface. In a blackout poem, the legacy remains as a reminder or a record of the master narrative. The blackout poem might also comment on the censorship of documents by officials and authority figures who seek to control information, turning this process on its head by blacking out the official story and letting the silenced story or argument speak its truth.

- Write a short essay (500 words) in which you explain what source document you chose and why you chose it; what method you chose (white-out, black marker, cutup, etc.) and why you chose it; and how your blackout or erasure poem aims to critique, reject, complicate, or otherwise address the master narrative.
UNIT 1. THE (UN)DOCUMENTED JOURNEY

ABOUT THIS UNIT

“Everyone leaves, if they need to, if they can, or if they have to” (Luiselli 32, LCA). Lost Children Archive takes the form of a travelogue centered on a family road trip from New York to Arizona. However, by doing so, the novel confronts many other types of trips within the US territory and across its borders—freely and not—along with different privileges and legal statuses. This unit is meant to explore the complexities of the US migration system and the different journeys the novel navigates while processing the construct of personal, collective, and historical memory.

“On Immigration,” the first subsection in this unit, provides a general overview of the migration legal changes and challenges in the US because of the so-called border crisis during the summer of 2014. The section also highlights the impact of these new vicissitudes on the court system while confronting this reality with the main characters’ immigration experiences.

The second subsection, “The Lost Children,” is a continuation of the first and explores the travel of unaccompanied minors, most of them refugees, that reach the US after facing difficult and dangerous obstacles, such as hunger, thirst, or crossing the desert by themselves.

Lastly, “The Last Free Men” exams the trip of the Chiricahua Apaches led by Geronimo, who are depicted as the last free Americans and could be considered among the nation’s first deportees inside the US. Following their surrender in 1886, the Chiricahuas were sentenced to manual labor at military camps in Florida, later moved to Mount Vernon Barracks, Alabama, and Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Despite their repeated pleas to go to a reservation in the West, the Chiricahua remained prisoners of war for close to thirty years.

Each subsection is interspersed with a variety of sample close-reading exercises, discussion questions, and in-class assignments. Ideas for possible unit projects are listed at the end.
RECOMMENDED PRIMARY SOURCES & READINGS


SECONDARY RECOMMENDED SOURCES & AND READINGS


• Kennedy, Elizabeth. “No Childhood Here: Why Central American Children are Fleeing Their Homes”. American Immigration Council, Jul. 2014.


• Miroff, Nick. “‘Kids in cages’: It’s true that Obama built the cages at the border. But Trump’s ‘zero tolerance’ immigration policy had no precedent.” The Washington Post, Oct. 23, 2020.


OPEN ACTIVITIES

Let’s talk about migration

Discussing migration in the classroom can promote critical thinking, empathy, community engagement, and cultural awareness among students. At the same time, it is essential to be aware that this can be a sensitive topic for certain people for different reasons. To start a productive exchange of ideas delicately, these are some questions that can help to initiate the conversation at the students’ discretion, without them feeling the need to share any specific details that they may not be comfortable with:
• Where do your family's roots lie? Are there any cultural or geographic origins that you feel especially connected to?

• While Wisconsin may not have enacted specific policies that directly impacted migration on a national scale, it has played a role in shaping US immigration-related discussions and policies. Create a timeline or chart that explores the history of immigration policy in Wisconsin and share your findings with the class. Examine how policies and attitudes towards immigration have evolved over time. Consider the impact of these policies on immigrant communities and the larger society. How have policymakers worked towards creating a fair and just solution for all? What patterns or trends can you identify? Here are a few points to consider:
  o **Progressive Era Labor Reforms**: During the late 19th to early 20th century, Wisconsin was at the forefront of labor reforms, advocating for better working conditions, fair wages, and protections for workers. These reforms had an impact on immigrant workers, including those in industries such as mining, manufacturing, and agriculture.
  o **Agricultural Labor**: The growth of the dairy industry in the state attracted many immigrants who worked as farm laborers and contributed to the development of the agricultural sector. Understanding the role of immigrant labor in the agricultural industry can provide insights into Wisconsin’s migration history.
  o **Refugee Resettlement**: Wisconsin has actively participated in refugee resettlement programs, welcoming and providing support to individuals and families fleeing conflict or persecution in their home countries.
  o **Immigration Enforcement**: According to the Center for Immigration Studies, Wisconsin cities such as Milwaukee and Madison are not sanctuary cities. However, they are part of the district that passed resolutions designating safe spaces for immigrant families. These policies limit local law enforcement’s cooperation with federal authorities and aim to protect rights and safety of immigrants within their jurisdictions.

• Why do you think people leave their home countries? What challenges may they face when adapting to a new culture and society?
How do you believe the US can better support and welcome immigrants?

How can our school create a more inclusive environment for immigrant students and their families?

In what ways can we build empathy and understanding for people who have experienced immigration-related challenges?

The Apache Removal

Beginning in 1849, the Chiricahua Apaches fought against settlers from both Mexico and the United States throughout the Southwest until 1886. After the end of the last major campaign, the US government took the approximately 500 remaining Chiricahuas as prisoners of war, seized their land, and removed them forcibly.

Before analyzing Lost Children Archive, it is recommended to speak about the Apache removal in class because of its significance and often overlooked historical importance. By examining this topic, students can be introduced to a greater understanding of the complex legacies of intergenerational trauma, colonialism, and systemic racism that continue to impact Indigenous communities. Furthermore, an open discussion about this topic can help students to gain better understanding and appreciation of the cultural diversity that makes American society today.

Here are some suggested exercises and questions to guide the conversation:

- Research what land you are living on. Students and teachers can use this interactive Native Land website to look up local Indigenous territories, treaties, and languages.
- Ask students how Apache communities have worked to preserve their culture in the face of forced removal and displacement. What lessons can we learn from their experiences? Some resources to start are: Apacheria, White Mountain Apache Tribe, or Mescalero Apache Cultural Center.
- Who was Geronimo, and what was his role in the Apache Wars?
- How do the experiences of Native American communities during the 19th century inform our understanding of systemic racism and colonialism in the United States?
- What ethical questions were raised by the Indian Removals, and how can we apply these lessons to contemporary issues?
• What rights do Indigenous peoples have over their lands and resources, and how have they been violated historically and in contemporary times?
• Land Repatriation and Restoration Initiatives include efforts to support Native communities and apologize for centuries of history filled with colonialism, theft, and the destruction of Indigenous communities. How do you think this can address historical injustices and ongoing impacts of land seizing on Indigenous communities and to promote more ethical and just relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in the US? Sources such as Resource Generation may be useful for this exercise.
• How do you think the non-Indigenous Americans viewed the Apache removal at the time, and how have these attitudes changed over time?

ON IMMIGRATION

“Violence against people starts with language, but so does resistance… Slavery in the U.S. used to be called our peculiar institution instead of slavery, deportation is called removal, in the same way that putting Indians into reservations was called removal, and undocumented is called illegal.” —Valeria Luiselli, Democracy Now! Interview

"Lost Children Archive is more a questioning of how and where we should stand in order to document political violence.” —Valeria Luiselli, Public Broadcasting Service. Interview

Valeria Luiselli has spoken openly about the political role of her writing and the importance of words and reconsidering how we think about immigration in numerous public appearances. In the summer of 2014, the writer—who was born in Mexico but grew up in South Africa and made her life in New York—went on a road trip with her family while waiting on her green card, the legal (and privileged) document that would allow her to be a permanent US resident. While driving through Oklahoma, they listened to radio news broadcasts about the crisis of unaccompanied minors in the South of the country: thousands of children fleeing Central America and crossing the US/Mexico border. Between October 2013 and September 2014, Border Patrol agents encountered almost 70,000 kids, an increase of 77% compared to 2013. Most of them came from the so-called “Northern Triangle” to escape poverty, exploitation, and violence in their home countries.
In June 2014, President Barack Obama described the situation explained above as an “urgent humanitarian situation” and said it was the responsibility of the US to fulfill the “legal and moral obligation” by appropriately caring for unaccompanied children that were apprehended. However, after the upswing in irregular migration, his administration outsourced immigration enforcement to Mexico to keep unaccompanied minors outside the country, partnered with Central American governments on anti-smuggling operations, and focused on information campaigns intended to deter undocumented border crossers. Children caught alone crossing into the US without documents were supposed to stay in the custody of Border Patrol agents for no more than 72 hours while they were screened. Nevertheless, because they were overwhelmed, many were held longer or in intermediate detention centers that were on military bases. Additionally, under US law, some unaccompanied children from both Canada and Mexico can immediately be deported unless they prove to the Border Patrol officers that they fear persecution or trafficking.

Inside the US, court-mandated deportations under Obama totaled close to three million, more people than in any other presidential administration, including George W. Bush’s. Moreover, Obama resurrected an all-but-discontinued practice of detaining mothers and children arrested at the border. This was the beginning of large family detention facilities that could hold
thousands and some temporary family separation procedures to discourage future undocumented migration. While these centers were controversial at the time, it wasn’t until the spring of 2018, under Donald Trump’s zero-tolerance policy, that they became a symbol of administrative cruelty associated with the government's intentional separation of children from their parents.

Furthermore, and as part of a more significant effort to address the immigration crisis, a fast-track hearings policy was implemented for unaccompanied minors and families in late July 2014. The new procedure instructed immigration judges to hold deportation hearings within 21 days of US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) initiating removal proceedings. As a result, immigration courts in the country were directed to speed up the process and prioritize new arrivals over other cases. This meant that children who previously had one year to find a lawyer to represent them saw their window decrease to 21 days. Likewise, although they have the right to an attorney, the government is not required to provide them with one so, since then, many children—some as young as eighteen months old—go before a judge without representation. According to government data, 90% of minors without legal assistance are deported.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) recognizes that “childhood is entitled to special care and assistance,” “special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection,” and that children in difficult situations need special consideration. Minors crossing country borders alone, escaping violence, and poverty should be identified in this convention approved by the United Nations. However, the US is the only U.N. country that has signed but not ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This means that, although the country agrees with its principles, they are not willing to be held legally responsible.

Lost Children Archive touches on the complexities of the immigration system in the US in multiple forms. The book addresses the emotional toll it takes on children and their families by exploring the loss, displacement, and struggle to maintain a sense of identity and belonging while being connected to one’s past and culture. This context of migration, and more specifically, of the immigration crisis at the Southern border, serves to examine the issue of political violence throughout the novel and confront its wrongdoings. In an interview with the writer—and once an unaccompanied minor—Javier Zamora, Luiselli explains the book is “a story that looks at immigration’s course and it looks at the way we can talk about political violence more generally.” This is not a novel about migration, but with migration.
Suggested Questions for Discussion:

- In your opinion, what are the most pressing ethical concerns involved in the migrant crisis at the border? Are they the same as those depicted in the novel?
- *Lost Children Archive* presents different types of migration and immigration status. For example, the mother’s (the main narrator) differs from Manuela’s and her daughters’. What are the distinctions and similarities among them?
- How do the characters in the novel experience migration as travelers and observers on the journey? What challenges do they face along the way?
- Have you encountered other stories, books, or films depicting the experiences of displaced individuals or communities? How did they portray the impact of displacement?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

- As a large group, ask students to identify the forms in which Luiselli addresses the political violence in the novel and reflect on their impact and effectiveness.
- Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a specific form of migration depicted in *Lost Children Archive* (i.e., child migration, forced migration, historical migration, etc.). In their groups, students should discuss how Valeria Luiselli portrays their assigned migration type in the novel. They can focus on the experiences of characters, narrative perspectives, and their significance within the story. Have each group summarize their findings in a few key points or bullet points that highlight the unique aspects of their assignment and share their summary with the class. If there is time at the end, facilitate a class discussion where students compare the different forms of migration explored in the novel. Encourage them to identify common themes, connections, and the author’s purpose in depicting these.
- Watch an episode of the documentary *Immigration Nation.* (Netflix, 2020):
  - How did the documentary capture the perspectives and voices of different stakeholders involved in the immigration system, such as immigrants, law enforcement officers, activists, and policymakers? Did it provide a comprehensive view of the various perspectives?
o What are some key takeaways or lessons learned about the complexities of the immigration system and the importance of thoughtful and compassionate approaches to addressing these issues?

o Ask students to write a response to the documentary, reflecting on their own experiences with immigration or their thoughts on the topic. This could be done as a journal entry, a letter to a member of Congress, or an essay.

Close-Reading Exercise:

In “Tongue Ties” (pgs. 16-17) the author describes the first encounter of the mother with Manuela while reflecting on the significance of language, culture, and identity in the following passage:

We asked each other about the places we were from, and the languages that we spoke at home. They were from Tlaxiaco, in the Mixteca, she told me. Her first language was Trique. I had never heard Trique, and the only thing I knew about it was that is one of the most complex tonal languages, with more than eight tones. My grandmother was Hñähñu and spoke Otomí, a simpler tonal language than Trique, with only three tones. But my mother didn’t learn it, I said, and of course I didn’t learn it either. When I asked her if her son could speak Trique, she told me no, of course not, and said: Our mothers teach us to speak, and the world teaches us to shut up. (Luiselli 16, LCA)

Suggested In-Class Exercises for previous passage:

• Ask students to reflect and share what they think the writer implies when she says: “Our mothers teach us to speak, and the world teaches us to shut up.” What does the quote suggest about the characters in the story? And about language and culture?
• Separate students in small groups or pairs and ask them to research the places, names, and languages mentioned: Tlaxiaco, Mixteca, Trique, Hñähñu, and Otomi. Have them to find one or two examples related to each. They could be proper nouns, common words,
greetings, cultural terms, or phrases relevant to the specific language or region. The examples of words and their pronunciation can be presented as a glossary, where students provide the word or phrase, its definition or explanation, and examples for pronunciation, if possible. This exercise aims to familiarize students with the multicultural and linguistic context of the novel and deepen their understanding of the diverse communities mentioned in the text.

- Have students investigate the sociopolitical repression of Indigenous languages and cultures in Mexico. Then, ask them to look up information on the linguistical repression the Indigenous people have historically suffered in the US. Lastly, compare the symbolic repression Indigenous people experience with the challenges migrants face in the US when leaving their home countries behind. Some resources to start are: [UNESCO’s Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger](https://www.unesco.org/en/unesco/wh/unesco-atlas-world-languages-danger), [Cultural Survival](https://www.culturesurvival.org/), [Indigenous Language Institute](https://www.indigenouslanguages.org/), or [National Geographic’s Enduring Voices](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/earth/our-cultures/enduring-voices/).

- After doing at least one other suggested activity, ask students to write a short poem about language and culture, depicting their research and own experiences.

**THE LOST CHILDREN**

“The children’s stories are always shuffled, stuttered, always shattered beyond the repair of a narrative order. The problem with trying to tell their story is that it has no beginning, no middle, and no end.”—Valeria Luiselli, *Tell me How it Ends*, 7.

Unaccompanied minors who try to reach US soil experience distressing life events in their journey: family separation, persecution, loss of loved ones, life-threatening situations, violence, etc. Most of them are detained close to the US/Mexico border, frequently after turning themselves into Border Patrol agents seeking help. Their apprehension sets in motion a multiagency government response and different levels of bureaucracy. There is no single institution that is responsible for a process that is both complex and traumatic for children (and adults). Consequently, they experience the mistreatment and lack of necessary care while dealing with the immigration system and its different steps: detention, screening, custody, trial, adjudication, and sometimes deportation. Some examples of this are depicted in Luiselli’s *Lost
Children Archive when she describes how children are treated when they board the plane for their deportation (pgs. 180-185), or how the authorities lose kids that were in their custody (p. 349).


*Lost Children Archive* is a fictional story that depicts the real-life experience of minors who have gotten lost in the chaos of the immigration system. As such, Luiselli’s novel focuses on migrant children’s narratives that echo their suffering and recognize political violence and social injustices as problems of our current society. Similarly, in *Tell Me How it Ends*—an essay publication based on the 40-question form used by Luiselli during her time as a translator for the federal immigration court in New York—the mother translates for an immigrant woman who paid a coyote to bring her daughters from Mexico to the US. In *Lost Children Archive*, Manuela’s daughters have their mother’s phone number sewn into the collar of their dresses because they are too young to memorize the numbers. However, after crossing the border by foot, they are
abandoned in the desert, and the two kids end up in an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center where they will be seen for the last time. While as readers of *Lost Children Archive*, we never know their point of view or their names—just like the four members of the family who travel across country—their story is at the core of the book, and this makes them protagonists from the beginning.

The novel simultaneously presents the stories of other unaccompanied minors that recount their experiences as third-person narrators in *Lost Children Elegies*. The children are also nameless, identified solely by numbers and an approximation of their age. This novel-within-the-novel produces a multimedia intertext full of epigraphs and citations that describe the journey of seven child migrants to the US, based partly on interviews that Luiselli conducted during her time as a volunteer translator. *Lost Children Elegies* is written by Ella Camposanto, a fictional Italian author (who is no other than Luiselli herself). The story, nevertheless, is grounded in the reinvention of the children’s crusade in Europe of 1212—thousands of boys and girls who took crusading vows to regain Jerusalem from Muslim rule: “In Camposanto’s version, the ‘crusade’ takes place in what seems like a not-so-distant future in a region that can possibly be mapped back to North Africa, the Middle East, and southern Europe, or to Central and North America (the children ride atop ‘gondolas,’ for example, a word used in Central America to refer to the wagons or cars of freight trains)” (Luiselli 139, *LCA*).

As Luiselli explains at the end of the book (p. 380), these elegies are inspired by the literary tradition of the voyage, or journey. Some examples of such texts include the *Odyssey* by Homer, *The Children’s Crusade* by Marcel Schwob, *Pedro Páramo* by Juan Rulfo, and *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad. As an example of “metafiction,” an explicitly self-reflective and self-conscious form of fiction that calls attention to its own narrative structure and artifice, *Lost Children Elegies* draws the migrant journey into the high-literary genre of the epic quest. The *Elegies* presents a new valence on the journey-narrative, an anti-road trip that confronts the intersection between the horizontal trajectory of New York-Arizona and the vertical migration from the global South to the North.

For Luiselli, the idea of dread is a recurring theme when addressing children's migration. The “credible fear” is present in both *Lost Children Archive* (pgs. 48-50) and in the questionnaires of *Tell Me How it Ends*, which makes reference to the legal requirement that asylum seekers must demonstrate a credible fear of persecution to remain in the US. The process
of establishing reasonable fear and navigating the asylum system is depicted as a complex and traumatic ordeal, as families are separated and detained, and children are subjected to harsh conditions and trauma. Nevertheless, language barriers, frightening authority figures, psychological duress caused by their experiences, or difficulties understanding the US asylum system (often without legal representation) are some of the many potential reasons that explain why a refugee child may not be able to voice their credible fears during the interview process.

*Lost Children Archive* provides a snapshot in the lives of child refugees and reminds the reader the importance of telling their experiences. According to Luiselli: “While the story continues, the only thing to do is tell it over and over again as it develops, bifurcates, knots around itself. And it must be told, because before anything can be understood, it has to be narrated many times, in many different words and from many different angles, by many different minds” (Luiselli 96-97, *Tell Me…*). Retelling these stories helps raise awareness and understanding of the complex issues migrant minors face by humanizing their experiences and promoting greater understanding and compassion. It is a tool for advocacy and political change that can encourage supporting humanitarian aid efforts to better protect vulnerable children.

**Suggested Questions for Discussion:**

- Who are the “lost children” in the novel? Are the children the only ones who are lost in the story?
- How many layers of “being lost” appear in *Lost Children Archive*?
- Why do you think Valeria Luiselli chose this title for her novel? What is, in your opinion, the significance of this name?
- How does the author use a child narrator to explore the experiences and perspectives of immigrant children? Do you find it effective?
- How did the lost children’s stories impact the family, and how did it change them?
- What is an elegy, and what do you think is the meaning behind the name *Lost Children Elegies*?
- Valeria Luiselli volunteered as a translator in New York for lawyers, working pro-bono, representing migrant children who arrived alone in the US. What role do interpreters play
during a “credible fear” interview, and what challenges do you think may arise communicating through a third person?

- Find examples of different forms of fear throughout the novel and explain what happens and who is experiencing these emotions. For instance, we can see fear of displacement, fear of separation, fear of the unknown, fear of deportation, fear of losing the identity or heritage, fear of violence, fear of danger, fear of disappearance of childhood innocence, etc.

Suggested In-Class Activities:

- In a large group, students look up the literary works that inspired Lost Children Elegies (p. 380) and then share it with the class.

- In pairs or small groups, have students research the Children’s Crusade in the 13th century. The following activity allows students to work collaboratively, engage in analysis, and visually represent their understanding of the Children’s Crusade. It can be completed within a class period and provides an opportunity for students to learn from each other's timelines.
  - Provide each group with a large sheet of paper or poster board, along with markers or colored pencils.
  - Give brief summaries or articles that outline the key events, causes, and outcomes of the Children’s Crusade. You can select reliable sources from history textbooks, reputable websites, or academic articles. A few places to start are:
    - “The Disastrous Time Tens of Thousands of Children Tried to Start a Crusade”
    - “The Children's Crusade: Thousands of Children March to Holy Land but Never Return”
    - “The Children’s Crusade: That Time Shepherds Tried to Conquer Jerusalem”
    - “Children’s Crusade: European History”

- Explain that the students will be creating a timeline of the Children’s Crusade. Each group will focus on a specific aspect or theme related to the event:
○ Group 1: Causes and motivations of the Children’s Crusade
○ Group 2: Routes and destinations of the Crusade
○ Group 3: Events and encounters along the way
○ Group 4: Outcome of the Children’s Crusade

• Instruct the groups to create a visual timeline on their paper or poster board, including key information, dates, and illustrations related to their assignment. Encourage them to be creative.
• Once the timelines are complete, have each group present and explain them to the class.

Follow-up Activity:

• After all the presentations, facilitate a class discussion to further explore the different aspects of the Children’s Crusade and discuss the overall impact.
• Discuss how the children's experiences in the Children’s Crusade and the migrant children in *Lost Children Archive* share similarities despite their historical and cultural differences. For example, both groups faced displacement, hardships, and uncertainty as they embarked on their journeys.
• Explore the impact of the Children’s Crusade and the contemporary issues depicted in *Lost Children Archive* on the lives of children. Talk about the physical and emotional toll on the children, their families, and the wider society. Examine the consequences of these events on individuals’ identities, well-being, and sense of belonging.

Close-Reading Exercises:

• In “Map” (pgs. 47-48) the girl asks the mother what it means to be a refugee and she answers: “What does it mean to be a refugee? I suppose I could tell the girl: A child refugee is someone who waits.” (Luiselli 48, *LCA*) Based on this quote:
  ○ Invite students to reflect and share their understanding of what it means.
  ○ Have students compare the experiences of child refugees as described by the author with their own and describe if the process of waiting and migration are different or similar on each case.
○ Ask students to locate specific examples of waiting in the novel and explain how these illustrate the experience and meaning of waiting for a refugee.

• While the family is traveling in the car, the mother reflects on migration and asylum seekers. She exposes her concern that US citizens think this is a foreign problem rather than a national reality. After wondering why some children are deported and others aren’t, she says:

No one thinks of the children arriving here now as refugees of a hemispheric war that extends, at least, from these very mountains, down across the country into the southern US and northern Mexican deserts, sweeping across the Mexican sierras, forests, and southern rain forests into Guatemala, into El Salvador, and all the way to the Celaque Mountains in Honduras. No one thinks of those children as consequences of a historical war that goes back decades. Everyone keeps asking: Which war, where? Why are they here? Why did they come to the United States? What will we do with them? No one is asking: Why did they flee their homes? (Luiselli 51, LCA).

Circulate copies of this quote among students, ask them to read it, and highlight ideas they are unfamiliar with. Afterward, you may conduct the following activities:

• Separate the students into small groups and ask them to discuss the passage, paying special attention to what the opening phrase “No one thinks of the children arriving here now” implies. Then, ask them to create a list of reasons why a person would leave their home country.

• Ask students to engage in a collaborative discussion analyzing what “hemispheric war” means, and to share whether they agree with the statement.

• Facilitate a discussion in which students explore questions not typically asked about the children fleeing their homes. Provide guiding questions such as:

  ○ Why do you think people tend to focus on questions like “Why did they come to the United States?” rather than “Why did they flee their homes?”
How might understanding the historical context and consequences of wars and conflicts impact our perception of refugees and their experiences?

What are the potential consequences of overlooking why children leave their homes when discussing immigration and refugee issues?

**THE LAST FREE MEN**

“This whole country, Papa said, is an enormous cemetery, but only some people get proper graves, because most lives don’t matter. Most lives get erased, lost in the whirlpool of trash we call history, he said.”—Valeria Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 215.

*Lost Children Archive* draws parallels between the difficulty of the Chiricahua Apaches and the undocumented children crossing the US border. Not only the children’s stories get lost. Like the minors whose experiences are phantoms, kept away from the public eye and the core of the collective memory, the Chiricahuas are victims of the specter of disappearance as well. In the novel, the Husband attempts to capture the echoes of what is left of the Chiricahuas led by Geronimo, whose grave is in a military cemetery. The narrator states: “He’s somehow trying to capture their past presence in the world, and making it audible, despite their current absence, by sampling any echoes that still reverberate of them” (Luiselli 141, *LCA*). The father is interested in documenting Chief Cochise, Geronimo, and their group because they were leaders of the last “free people” on the American continent to surrender.

Historical documents date Apache ancestry in the Chiricahua Mountains to at least the late 1600s. The Chiricahua people shared language, customs, territory, and family ties with other groups of Native American residents in the Southwest of the US. It is believed the Apache name to be a Spanish transliteration of *ápachu*, which means “enemy” in the language of the Zuni people—a Native American pueblo from New Mexico (*Britannica*). Before the European contact and its posterior settlements, the Apache domain extended over Mexico and the US: in modern day east central and southeastern Arizona, southeastern Colorado, southwestern and eastern New Mexico, western Texas, northern Chihuahua, and Sonora. In total, they were spread across approximately 15 million acres of land on the US/Mexico border.

Originally the interactions between the US government and the Apaches were amicable and cooperative since both parties had endured animosity against Mexico. In 1861, however,
Chief Cochise went on the warpath and broke the peace agreement between the Chiricahua Apaches and the US, marking the beginning of 25 years of conflict. The cause of hostilities included the Apaches’ refusal to live in reservations, along with mining developments to extract coal, gold, and silver. Over the years, more people were migrating to the Southwest and appropriating vital resources for their use, especially water and land.

After the Mexican-American War (1846–1848), the settlers set boundaries and limits on where the Apaches could live, which was not welcome. Most of them initially fought vigorously but had no choice but to negotiate a peace treaty in the end. The US army eventually outmatched the Apache war effort and, as a result, they had to surrender. In 1865, the Navajo nation agreed to settle on a reservation in New Mexico and other Apachean groups followed them between 1871 and 1873. However, many warriors still refused to change their nomadic way of living for a permanent confinement and erratic raids against the US forces continued, led by chiefs Geronimo and Victorio.

The initial reservation for the Chiricahua Apaches was established in 1872 and included at least a portion of their homeland. By 1876, the difficult situation worsened, though, when the Chiricahuas were evicted and forced on to a reservation with other Apache groups in San Carlos, an inhospitable terrain in Arizona. The warrior and chief Geronimo despised this place, and for the next decade, he and his followers repeatedly broke out of confinement, despite the best efforts of the US army to keep them inside. Once the Chiricahuas were out of San Carlos, finding them and bringing them back wasn’t an easy task due to their knowledge of northern Mexico and southern Arizona terrain. Their repeated escapes embarrassed and provoked US authorities in the Southwest.

Geronimo and his group of more than thirty warriors, known as the Apache Resistance, eluded the US troops for years. In May 1885, the leader—in his 60s—and a group of 135 men, women, and children broke out from the reservation one last time. Over the following months, Geronimo’s group raided Mexican and American settlements, and only once General Crook enlisted the aid of Apache scouts could the US army locate and fight them. In late March 1886, Geronimo almost surrendered to Crook, although he managed to escape and disappear that same night. Soon, the Chiricahuas were followed by nearly a quarter of the standing US army and thousands of Mexican soldiers. On September 4, 1886, Geronimo finally gave himself up to General Nelson, becoming the last Indian commander to surrender to the United States military.
Following Geronimo’s surrender, the federal government planned to relocate all the Chiricahua Apaches to Florida. All, including the scouts who assisted the US Army in the capture, were considered prisoners of war, and sentenced to manual labor in army camps. In 1886, seventy-six Chiricahuas arrived at Fort Marion via train while another five groups followed them. In total, the government deported 515 Chiricahua Apaches to Florida, including seventeen warriors, ninety-nine men, and 399 women and children. (Haes 6)

The prisoners remained in captivity until after Geronimo’s death and were moved two more times before their release: first to Mount Vernon Barracks, Alabama, and then Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Over the years, their captors allowed them to take part in World’s Fairs and Wild West Shows, cashing in on Geronimo’s growing fame. The Chiricahua leader was often advertised as the “Tiger of the Human Race” or “The Apache Terror.” His popularity reached its highest peak when he took part in President Theodore Roosevelt’s inaugural parade in Washington, D.C. (1905) along with five other Native American leaders. Following this public appearance, Geronimo had the opportunity to speak to Roosevelt and ask for the Chiricahuas to be sent back to their native land, but the President denied his request out of fear of a new war.

The federal government freed the Chiricahuas in 1913, on a bittersweet day known as “The Parting.” Geronimo had passed away four years earlier from pneumonia, which he contracted after falling off his horse into a ditch. After twenty-seven years of captivity, the Chiricahua Apaches population had diminished from 506 to 257 people—138 men and 119 women—due to disease and the hardships and conditions of the camps (Jackson Jr.). Of the 257, 190 chose to return to a portion of their homeland in New Mexico, on the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation, while the 67 remaining opted to stay at Fort Sill and await promised allotments. The day of the separation meant saying goodbye to relatives and friends and leaving behind the graves of those Chiricahua who died during captivity and were buried at the military facility.

Lost Children Archive plays with the simultaneous presence and absence of the Chiricahua Apaches as a metaphor that serves different purposes. On one hand, their inclusion creates a parallelism between the undocumented migrants and the Native Americans. The two groups suffer from social injustices and their lives “get erased” by history (Luiselli 215, LCA). Both have faced displacement, violence, social injustices, and mistreatment by the US
government and its citizens. They are, in essence, a vulnerable population that should be protected but are not.

On the other hand, the displaced warriors mirror the family during their road trip. By the time they reach the journey’s goal, the Apacheria—the Chiricahua Apaches’ homeland—it is clear the parents’ marriage cannot survive and the relationship they once had no longer exists. They are also the echo of a family, a tribe composed of strangers that are slowly disappearing. Additionally, when the children arrive to the Chiricahua Mountains (p. 319), the place where the Apache children used to hide according to the tales they hear from the father, the arc of the story peaks: “And south into the heart of light we walked, Memphis, you and me, close together and quiet, as the lost children walked somewhere, too” (Luiselli 319, LCA). After elaborating on a possible scenario with the whereabouts of the lost children (p. 321), the boy and the girl discover an abandoned train car here where they meet a group of migrant kids (p. 330) that mimic those from Lost Children Elegies. By doing so, the author highlights how the kids are simultaneously Chiricahua and lost children. The mode of transportation that was once used to take the Apaches far from their homeland is now the meeting point where children from the North and children from the South cross paths and become one. It is a chapter full of intersectionality where imagination, fantasy, history, and reality cohabit.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

- Who are the “white-eyes” in the novel and why are they called that?
- How does the theme of lost or displaced children resonate throughout Lost Children Archive?
- Discuss the parallels between the Chiricahua Apache removal and contemporary immigration issues. How does the novel explore the connections between past and present experiences of displacement, social injustice, and marginalization?
- How do the stories and oral traditions of the Chiricahua Apaches shape the narrative of the novel, and what insights do they provide into their culture and history? Who tells these stories in the novel and why does it matter?
- How do the characters grapple with their own sense of identity and displacement? Can this be connected to the Chiricahua Apaches?
The family in the story is nameless but we know their fictional Chiricahua’s names. Why do you think the author made that choice and what impact does this have on the reader’s engagement with the story?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

- Valeria Luiselli includes clips of news, books, loose notes, and a photograph of “Geronimo and fellow prisoners on their way to Florida, September 10, 1886” in Box V. Analyzing this image in class can be a good opportunity to delve into the historical context of the Chiricahua Apache removal and its significance in the novel. Here are some ideas:

  Geronimo and his followers on their way to Florida, 1886. [State Library and Archives of Florida](https://www.floridastatearchives.org/collection-details/CS0009263).

  - Identify the people in the picture. What do you notice about their clothing, facial expressions, and body language? What emotions or experiences might they portray?
  - How do you think the image depicts the Chiricahua Apache removal? What elements indicate their displacement and forced relocation into the military camp?
  - Discuss how the image aligns with the novel’s central themes, such as displacement, loss, and the erasure of certain groups’ history.
How do you think Lost Children Archive complements or expands upon the insights highlighted in the image?

- The World’s Fairs and Wild West Shows in which Native Americans, including the Chiricahua Apaches, had to take part have ties to the broader historical context of colonialism, cultural representation, and the marginalization of indigenous peoples. These large exhibitions were held in various cities around the world during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and were popular forms of entertainment that depicted and exaggerated the romanticized image of the American West, including Native American cultures. With this in mind, separate the students into small groups of pairs for the following activities.
  - Assign the students a specific World’s Fair or Wild West Show (i.e., Chicago World’s Fair of 1893, Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, etc.).
  - Instruct students to research the following topics:
    - How were Native American cultures portrayed in these exhibitions.
    - What impact and reception did that these kinds of shows have on the public perception of Indigenous people.
    - How does the Lost Children Archive address or challenge these representations? In what ways does the novel explore the consequences of such portrayals on indigenous communities?
    - How does the novel engage with the themes of cultural representation, identity, and the impact of historical events like the Chiricahua Apaches’ removal.
  - Have each group present their findings to the class, sharing key points and relevant examples.

UNIT ACTIVITIES AND PROJECT IDEAS

- Ask students to imagine they are one of the characters of the novel—a member of the family, a Chihuahua Apache, a migrant, etc.—and ask them to write a 500-word journal in which they reflect on their character’s emotions and experiences in connection with the current sociopolitical events.
- Have students to create visual or multimedia artwork inspired by the novel’s themes of migration, memory, and displacement. They can use various mediums such as painting, collage, photography, music, or digital media to express their interpretations and reflections on the topics explored in the book. At the end, ask them to present their pieces and explain their meaning to the class.

- Print out and distribute maps of North and South America to the students. Have them research and map out different migration journeys within the US and across its borders, considering both historical and contemporary contexts. Then, ask them to identify key locations mentioned in the novel and plot them on the map, along with the characters’ journeys.
UNIT 2. ECHOES AND ARCHIVES

ABOUT THIS UNIT

In *Lost Children Archive*, archives, documentation, and memory play crucial roles in shaping the narrative and exploring key themes such as social injustices, migration issues, and family crises. The novel is a result of a road trip the writer took with her family to the US Southern border amidst the 2014 immigration crisis, as well as her experience as pro-bono translator in New York for lawyers representing migrant children who arrived alone in the US. This literary work invites readers to reflect on the significance of preserving history, creating identity, the subjectivity of truth, and the power dynamics inherent to archival work.

This unit investigates the significance of documentation and archives in preserving and reconstructing personal and collective memory in Valeria Luiselli’s work. In this unit you will examine how these factors contribute to both collective and historical memory and explore how they shape our understanding of history and identity.

“The Power of Documentation” considers documentation and its importance to the preservation of both historical and personal experiences. This subsection discusses various forms of documentation that appear in the novel, such as written records, photographs, audio recordings, etc. It also introduces students to the ways in which archives act as repositories of historical materials that shape our perceptions of the past.

The second subsection of this unit, “Between Archivists,” examines the archivist’s role in the story. It also investigates the responsibility, authority, and ethical implications of archival practices in the construction and preservation of memory.

Within each subsection you will find various exercises and activities, as well as some possible unit project ideas. Finally, “Working with the Boxes in *Lost Children Archive*” compiles a comprehensive list of each box and its contents. This list can be used for a variety of classroom activities and discussions, allowing students to delve into each boxes’ significance.
RECOMMENDED SOURCES & AND READINGS

OPEN ACTIVITIES

Archive Exploration

Engaging in activities about archive exploration before starting this unit may help students to reflect on historical biases and the construction of narratives. Analyzing primary sources to confront dominant narratives will allow students to develop critical thinking skills and gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of historical interpretation, including those that Lost Children Archive exposes.

Suggested In-Class Exercises:

• Divide students into small groups and give them primary sources on current and relevant topics, such as migration, climate change, political events, or social injustices. These materials might include newspaper clips, news broadcasts, photographs, postcards, letters, e-mails, etc. Ask each group to examine these items and the information they provide, focusing on how they construct a particular narrative. Then ask students to reflect on each source’s potential biases, informational gaps, and perspectives. Finally, have a class discussion in which each group shares their thoughts about the challenges
and complexities of reconstructing narratives from archival materials. Some questions that may guide your material’s analysis, include:

- What biases or perspectives might be present in this source? How might the author’s background, beliefs, or social context influence their presentation of information?
- Are there any gaps or omissions in the information provided? What additional information or perspectives might provide a more complete understanding of the topic?
- Can you identify potential conflicts of interest that might influence the source’s reliability or objectivity? What motivations or agendas may the author have had while creating these materials?
- Are there any alternative perspectives or conflicting accounts of the same event? How might these different viewpoints challenge or reinforce the information presented?
- What additional sources or types of evidence would you seek to corroborate this information? How might consulting multiple sources help students identify and navigate biases, information gaps, and a multitude of perspectives?

- As a large group, ask students some of the following questions in your discussion of documentation and the construction of both personal and historical narratives:
  - In what ways does documentation shape our understanding of historical events and personal narratives?
  - How might different forms of documentation (photographs, letters, oral histories, news, etc.) influence our perception and interpretation of the past?
  - What ethical considerations are involved in documenting and representing the experiences of others?
  - Do you think personal biases and perspectives can influence the documentation process?
THE POWER OF DOCUMENTATION

“I see Lost Children Archive as a book primarily about storytelling, the way we compose narratives, and how those narratives may or may not become the way we make sense of the world. We use narrative to make the world less horrifying, for example, or more beautiful.”—Valeria Luiselli, Longreads Interview.

“In order to transcend the limits of time, space, and the fragile nature of human memory, societies depend on archives. Archives are created to transcend the limitations of the oral.”—Rodney G.S. Carter, “Of Things Said and Unsaid” (222).

Documentation refers to the process of capturing, recording, and preserving information, events, experiences, and knowledge. Its purpose is to create a permanent record of both historical and personal experiences, ensuring their preservation for future generations. Documentation is crucial to the preservation of our history and collective memory. By documenting our past and present, we contribute to the continuity of human understanding and remembrance. Our documentation practices also directly inform the future.

The documentation and archives in Lost Children Archive reflect how power dictates history. This literary work considers the connection between archival construction, historical memory, and political power in both form and content (Montero Román, 174). The collections’ maps, postcards, notes, sound compilations, books, and other items speak about documentary and archival techniques, accenting how narratives are built, repressed, or erased from history.

Valeria Luiselli has argued that one of the fundamental questions in Lost Children Archive is the different approaches to building stories and how storytelling makes sense of the world, which we can observe through the main characters (Owens). The marriage of the primary characters in the novel is formed by a “documentarian” and a “documentarist” who work compiling sounds. The mother and father met when the two teamed up on a New York City soundscape project: a collection of the city’s sounds, noises, and languages. As soon as this endeavor is over, though, they come to realize the subtle but significant differences that their professions bring up:
We’d say that I was a documentarist and he was a documentarian, which meant that I was more like a chemist and he was more like a librarian. What he never understood about how I saw my work—the work I did before we met and the work I was probably going back to now, with the lost children’s story—was that pragmatic storytelling, commitment to truth, and a direct attack on issues was not, as he thought, a mere adherence to a conventional form of radio journalism. I’d come of age as a professional in a very different sound-setting and political climate. The way I learned to record sound was fundamentally about not fucking it up, about getting the facts of the story as right as possible without getting killed because, alas, you got too close to the source, and without getting the sources killed because, alas they got too close to you. My apparent lack of greater aesthetic principles was not a blind obedience to funders and funding, as he often said. (Luiselli 99, LCA)

This distinction between the ethical dimensions of a story (getting the “facts” right and not doing harm to the subjects) and the aesthetic dimensions of a story (form, style, genre, etc.) creates conflict for the couple. As a sound artist, the husband has a freer approach to composing and documenting stories and lets sound come to him gradually, which the wife admires and criticizes equally. As a “documentarian,” he is likened to a librarian, suggesting his openness to the natural unfolding of the narrative, capturing moments as they occur. His methodology is fluid, flexible, and intuitive, allowing for both spontaneity and serendipitous discoveries.

This analogy draws on the idea that a librarian is often associated with organizing and cataloging information, curating resources, and facilitating access to knowledge. In this context, he may be seen as more open-ended and exploratory, akin to organizing and navigating a diverse range of materials without strict adherence to a predetermined narrative or structure. In contrast, the wife’s approach is more controlled and follows a fixed storyline that includes sound as a narrative controlled by the producer. As a “documentarist,” her work has a set structure and can be likened to the working processes of a chemist. This is to say; she sees sound as a narrative element that needs to be orchestrated to create a coherent story.
The husband’s unbound spirit and intuitive approach clashes with the woman’s need for structure and control. Their opposing perspectives on how narratives should be constructed and how sound is integrated reflect a broader tension between ethics and aesthetics in storytelling and documentation. He values artistic freedom and organic storytelling, while she prioritizes accuracy, and the ethical impacts of her work:

I was a journalist, had always been, even though I had ventured outside my sound-range for a while and was now confused about how to return to my work, about how to reinvent a method and form, and find meaning again in what I did. And he was an acoustemologist and soundscape artist, who had devoted his life to sampling echoes, winds, and birds, then found some economic stability working on the city soundscape project, he had complied with more conventional ways but never really abandoned his ideas about sound; and I had immersed myself in the project, learned from it, and enjoyed not feeling burdened, for a change, by concerns about the immediate political consequences of what I was recording. (Luiselli 100, LCA)

Valeria Luiselli explores the complexities of creating narratives through this duality that also highlights the ethics of representation and documentation. The writer is asking us to reflect on dominant narratives and challenge more inclusive practices that amplify marginalized voices to promote a more comprehensive society. She actively seeks to include various identities, backgrounds, points of view, and perspectives in her storytelling, while approaching the narrative with cultural awareness and relevant historical context. At the same time, however, her reflection hides the sad recognition that archives are built narratives and, as such, they can only bring us so close to the past or any universal truth.

Inclusive Practices Exercises:

- Assign students to write a 400-words response paper where they reflect on the inclusive practices within *Lost Children Archive*. They should explore the various strategies
employed by Valeria Luiselli in the novel to reshape narratives, promote inclusivity, equity, and reflect of the diverse tapestry of our contemporary societies.

- Ask the class, in small groups or individually, to identify moments in the novel where marginalized characters’ voices could be amplified. Have students to imagine and write alternative dialogues that empower these characters to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences more authentically.
- As a class, have students analyze media representations of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, or Indigenous peoples in news articles, films, or documentaries. Ask them to compare these representations with the way these groups are portrayed in Lost Children Archive and discuss the ethical implications and potential impacts this may have.

When the main character’s husband announces his trip to Arizona to pursue a sound project following the Chiricahua Apache’s echoes, she initially agrees to accompany him, hoping to keep working on her children’s migration story. In preparation for the journey, the four family members fill the car’s track with boxes containing books, Polaroid photos, maps, sound recordings, notes, and news clips related to their projects. Four belong to the father, another is the mother’s, and the remaining two boxes are for each of the children to fill as they travel from New York to the Chiricahua Mountains.

The content of each box becomes a mobile and living archive that intercalates the novel’s chapters. Throughout Lost Children Archive, the reader connects with phrases, news and songs heard on the radio, fragments of books read aloud, and stories told by different family members. In this way, the past of the Indian Removal Act and Geronimo’s legend cross and confront the present refugee emergency as well as the marriage crisis. Additionally, the various forms of documentation help the narrative and develop the protagonists’ understanding of the world around them via observation. For instance, the mother keeps record of the family’s experiences during the trip and reflects on their evolving emotions. The official documents and news related to immigration and border policies note the bureaucratic and complex nature of the immigration system that migrants, like Manuela and her daughters, navigate. The family photographs evoke memory and a sense of identity while capturing a source of comfort from a recent shared history. And the audio recordings, along with the Apache’s stories, contribute to the exploration of
collective and cultural memory. In sum, the diversity of the archive in the novel allows the characters to capture and preserve both personal and global experiences while processing their journey and exploring broader and historical contexts.

By portraying the existence of personal, migrant, historical events, and oral repositories, *Lost Children Archive* emphasizes how archives compile different visions of the past. The novel suggests that engaging with both historical materials and personal artifacts allows for a more nuanced understanding of history, memory, and the complexities of identity and human experiences.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

- How does the concept of documentation manifest in *Lost Children Archive*? What forms of documentation are portrayed in the novel, and what role do they play in the narrative?
- What ethical considerations arise when documenting personal and collective experiences? How does *Lost Children Archive* raise awareness of these moral dilemmas?
- Discuss the novel’s relationship to documentation, memory, and storytelling. How does documentation contribute to the preservation of both personal and historical memory? How does it impact the construction of narratives?
- In *Lost Children Archive*, the characters engage in different forms of documentation, such as keeping journals and notes, taking photographs, and making audio recordings. What are the implications of using these different mediums? How do they shape the overarching narrative and our understanding of the characters’ experiences?
- Reflect on the significance of documentation from the perspective of migration and displacement. How does documentation serve as a tool for amplifying migrants’ stories?
- Think about the role of documentation in the novel. What do archives represent, and how do they influence our understanding of history and memory? How does Valeria Luiselli’s novel explore the idea of archives as repositories of different visions of the past?
- Discuss the significance of the number of boxes mentioned in the novel. Ask students to speculate on the reasons for having multiple boxes and what it might suggest about the characters and their attachment to their belongings. Do you think the varying quantities
of boxes reflect the complexities of the characters’ journeys or their emotional connections?

- What qualities or characteristics do you associate with a chemist? And with a librarian? Do you think Luiselli’s analogy in the novel helps to illustrate the differences in approach between the speaker and the documentarian? Why or why not?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

- Divide the students into small groups of 3-5 and ask them to choose a significant personal experience or contemporary event to document. Then, encourage them to think about different forms of documentation, such as writing a journal entry, creating a collage, taking photographs, recording an audio reflection, etc. Afterward, each group will share their documentation ideas, explain their work, and discuss how the chosen mediums impact the representation of their experiences. As a follow-up, instructors can compare each group and ask students to point out:
  - How are their experiences similar? How are they different?
  - What could be the gaps of each groups’ documentation?
  - How can the archives be challenged to offer a more complete perspective?
  - How would each student feel if someone else was responsible for documenting this event?

- Have students select a particular event or character from the novel and envision how their journey might be documented from a different perspective. For instance, they could create a photo series depicting the mother’s point of view or any other character’s perspective during the road trip. Encourage them to explore the significance of documentation in shaping narratives and consider how alternate perspectives can challenge dominant or biased accounts found in the novel. This activity aims to prompt critical thinking about the power of storytelling through diverse viewpoints.

- Select a few key scenes from *Lost Children Archive* that involve visual documentation, such as the Polaroid photos or the maps from Box V. Circulate copies of these images among students and ask them to analyze and interpret their visual elements. Invite them
to focus on what the photographs reveal about the characters’ perspectives and emotions as well as how visual documentation contributes to their narratives.

Close-Reading Exercise:

Circulate copies of the following fragment to students and ask them to read it, individually or in groups, paying attention to its form and content.

In other words, the ways in which we each listened to and understood the sounds of the world around us were probably irreconcilable. I was a journalist, had always been, even though I had ventured outside my sound-range for a while and was now confused about how to return to my work, about how to reinvent a method and form, and find meaning again in what I did. And he was an acoustemologist and soundscape artist who had devoted his life to sampling echoes, winds, and birds, then found some economic stability working on the city project, he had complied with more conventional ways but never really abandoned his ideas about sound; and I had immersed myself in the project, learned from it, and enjoyed not feeling burdened, for a change, by concerns about the immediate political consequences of what I was recording. But I was now gravitating back to the problems and questions that I had always haunted me. We were both back to chasing our old ghosts—that, at least, we still shared. And now that we were each venturing out on our own again, and somehow also returning to the places we had each come from, our paths were dividing. It was a deeper chasm than we’d expected. (Luiselli 100, LCA)

After reading the passage, instructors can ask students some of the following questions:

- Who is the narrator, and how do you think their profession influences their perspective on documentation and storytelling? Does their role shape their understanding of the world and their place in it?
• What do the terms *journalist* and *acoustemologist* imply about the different approaches to documenting and understanding the sounds of the world? How does their professional background influence their methods, motivations, and relationship to the archive?

• Consider the phrase “chasing our old ghosts” and its significance regarding the themes of documentation, narrative creation, and the ethics of the archive. How do these “old ghosts” shape the narrator’s understanding of their work, past, and identity?

• Ask students to imagine themselves as the journalist or the *acoustemologist* from the quote and have them write 500-word essays where they reflect on their roles, experiences, and challenges in documenting and creating narratives. Instruct them to consider the ethics in their respective fields and how they navigate their personal and professional journeys.

• Discuss the notion of economic stability and conventional ways that the text notes concerning the pursuit of one’s passion and the ethics of representation. How does Valleria Luiselli reconcile the economic demands of the character’s work with their desire to explore sound and its meanings?

**BETWEEN ARCHIVISTS**

“Following tracks, putting back together scraps and debris, and reassembling remains, is to be implicated in a ritual which results in the resuscitation of life, in bringing the dead back to life by reintegrating them in the cycle of time, in such a way that they find, in a text, in an artefact or in a monument, a place to inhabit, from where they may continue to express themselves.”


Historian and political theorist Achille Mbembe argues that examining archives implies being interested in what is left behind to keep it alive (24-25). As such, *Lost Children Archive* underscores the importance of preserving memory, amplifying silenced voices, and uncovering hidden narratives. In the novel, the father, mother, son, and daughter—the latter only to a certain extent—take turns becoming archivists who document and preserve personal and collective experiences. All the protagonists indeed portray the act of archiving to connect with the past, understand the present, and give agency to those whose stories have been marginalized. By
actively listening, sensing, and exploring the layers of history, personal experiences, migration, and intertextuality, they unveil external and internal echoes that take the shape of different formats.

**The father**

The father records sounds, conversations, and moments in New York and throughout their journey to the southwestern US as part of his job as a sound artist. However, the peak of his documentation task comes during the road trip, when he starts working on his “inventory of echoes,” following the trace of Chiricahua Apaches. As such, Steven Feld, one of his mentors and researcher in the novel, compares his project with one of his own. The mother finds a note in one of his husband’s boxes where the scholar states that this project “resounds the Bosavi dual power of agency, being at once acoustemic diagnosis of the h/wealth of a living world, and the ‘gone reflections/reverberations’ of those have ‘become’ its birds by achieving death” (Luiselli 97, *LCA*). After studying the Bosavi people in Papua New Guinea for years, Feld—a real ethnomusicologist—realized that the Bosavi understood birds as echoes, “as absence turned into a presence; and, at the same time, as a presence that made an absence audible. The Bosavi emulated bird sounds during funeral rites because birds were the only materialization in the world that reflected absence” and resonance of their ancestors (Luiselli 98, *LCA*).

Both the father’s project and Feld’s work with the Bosavi people revolve around echoes to understand the world and preserve memory. The two aim to make the absence audible, to evoke the presence of what has already passed. The father’s inventory, therefore, is a sonic archive of lived experiences that captures external soundscapes and emotions, stories, and cultural echoes of the people and places they encounter. He is capturing tracks that disappeared long ago while actively preserving their cultural memories and history.
Additionally, the father’s role as an archivist goes beyond his recordings. He carefully organizes and compiles soundtracks, books, notes, maps, etc., creating a collection that archives their journey even before they leave. As mentioned previously, most of the boxes in the car’s trunk are his (Box I–Box IV), and they are full of different types of materials that may help him with his inventory, although his wife references them occasionally.

Reflecting on Sound and Memory Exercises:

- Write a 400-words essay reflecting on the role of sound in preserving memory and discuss how soundscapes, conversations, and other auditory experiences contribute to your understanding of past events. Share any personal experiences where a particular sound triggered memories or emotions and explain why certain sounds have the power to evoke strong reactions and connections to the past.
- Introduce students to the idea of the Bosavi people’s use of bird sounds as echoes to evoke absence and presence. In groups of 2-3, have them research other cultures or societies that use echoes, sounds, or rituals to connect with their history or ancestors. Ask students later to present their findings, highlighting how these practices reflect the themes of echoes and memory preservation. In the end, have a class discussion and encourage students to consider the ethical challenges of accurately representing cultural practices.
and traditions in media or storytelling without cultural appropriation or misrepresentation.

The mother

In contrast with the father, the mother’s research revolves around documenting the experiences of migrant children and their families along the southern US border. As a journalist who works with sounds, she is invested in shedding light on the stories and struggles of migrant refugees and their communities, which she ends up approaching from her husband’s project lenses later in the novel. The narrator states:

I am still not sure how I’ll do it, but the story I need to tell is the one of the children who are missing, those whose voices can no longer be heard because they are, possibly forever, lost. Perhaps, like my husband, I’m also chasing ghosts and echoes. Except mine are not in history books, and not in cemeteries. (Luiselli 146, LCA)

The woman recognizes the need to tell the stories of those children whose narratives are hauntingly absent from the mainstream and distinguishes them from her husband’s investigation. From her perspective, her subject is alive and present. The man focuses on the past, while she is concerned about the immediate future. Hence, she sees her work as urgent and relevant and feels a great deal of responsibility as she grapples with the significance of her project: “The story I have to record is not the story of children who arrive, those who finally make it to their destination and can tell their own story. The story I need to document is not that of the children in immigration courts, as I once thought. The media is doing that already, documenting the crisis as well as possible” (Luiselli 146, LCA). The mother feels compelled to focus on aspects of the narrative that cannot be told by the protagonists—the migrant children—or are not already covered by the broadcasting. At the same time, she wants to think of the project with a narrative distance that she hopes to find in the books about migration and the archive she brings with her (p. 24). All of this reflects understanding of the ethical implications and the significance of storytelling and documentation projects: not everyone who can speak about other groups should do so.
When referring to migrants, refugees, and migration narratives, media, the arts, and celebrities often claim to “give voice to the voiceless.” However, marginalized groups and individuals living in poverty or undocumented situations are not voiceless, they lack a space of representation where they can make their voices heard. As the human rights advocate Abdul Aziz Muhamat states: “While this can empower, it can also be a potentially harmful tool for them too. It makes me feel like an object, it discourages me from speaking for myself and most importantly, it is dehumanizing because someone else is speaking on my behalf. Being a refugee means more than being an alien, no right, no voice; this can sound trite, clichéd, even patronizing” (Geneva Solutions). All discursive construction is filtered and follows an agenda, but representation can be operative at a concrete and symbolical level, making the absent present (Buikema 93). Consequently, media scholars such as Leen d’Haenens and Willem Joris have addressed the representational strategies on migration from a multi-stakeholder perspective, stressing the importance for minority groups to have access to the news as actors or authors (439).

Besides addressing the relevance of ethical storytelling and media representation, the mother in Lost Children Archive seeks to raise awareness about the injustices and challenges faced by migrants, aiming to challenge prevailing narratives surrounding immigration. In “Guns & Poetry,” for example, she confronts the overtone media sources use when characterizing refugee children (pgs. 124-127). The article “Kids, a Biblical Plague” that she finds in a local newspaper in Broken Bow is full of sensationalism with statements like: “children streaming from chaotic Central American nations to the U.S.,” “illegal alien children,” or “These children carry with them viruses that we are not familiar with in the United States” (Luiselli 124, LCA). The mother manifests how this narrative perpetuates the stereotype of Latinxs as barbarians who threaten “civilized white peace” (p. 124) and wonders if finding a softer version of xenophobia—like the one she deals with daily as a Mexican living in NY—is better. Throughout the novel, she defends the media’s ability to create narratives that might contribute to a national discourse of who belongs in the US. As such, she draws a relationship between racialized displacements/removals and archival marginalization that dictates whose stories are included in American history and whose are not (Montero Román 175).

Furthermore, the mother’s box (Box V) contains migrant mortality reports, a clipping photograph of objects found on migrant trains in the desert, and a Humane Borders map that
depicts the migrants’ monthly deaths in the US Southern border. This collection helps to humanize the statistics by connecting them to personal stories and tangible evidence while emphasizing the woman’s urgency for awareness, compassion, and change in border policies and practices. Every year, hundreds of migrants disappear or lose their lives due to inhumane border policies funneling people toward remote and deadly regions of the US/Mexico border (Missing Migrant Project). Since its implementation in 1994, the Prevention Through Deterrence strategy has militarized the border and blocked popular clandestine crossing spots, forcing migrants into the deathly desert areas and river crossings while not stopping the migration flow. Initiatives such as Hostile Terrain 94 (HT94), a pop-up participatory installation orchestrated by the Undocumented Migration Project (UMP) and directed by anthropologist and MacArthur fellow Jason De León, highlights these harrowing realities. The immersive art exhibit comprises over 3,400 handwritten toe tags, each symbolizing migrants who have tragically perished while attempting to traverse Arizona’s Sonoran Desert from the mid-1990s to 2022. These poignant tags are meticulously placed on a wall map of the desert, pinpointing the precise locations where these lives met their tragic end.

Prevention Through Deterrence Exercise:

- Ask students to research Prevention Through Deterrence and divide the class into two groups. Assign each group subtopics related to this strategy, such as border wall, border patrol, desert crossings, detention centers, etc. Have each group create a collective mind map that explores each topic’s ethical considerations, practices, challenges, and human impacts and share their findings with the class afterward. To conclude the activity, ask students to look up individuals, organizations, or activists who work supporting migrants’ rights and write them a letter where they 1) express their impressions and concerns about Prevention Through Deterrence and 2) suggest ideas to collaborate and help migrants from Wisconsin.

These are some of the many organizations that can help students with their research:

- Aguilas del desierto
- Border Angels
- Casa Alitas
- Colibrí Center
- Humane Borders
- Missing Migrant Project
- No More Deaths
- Armadillos Ni un Migrante Menos
- Undocumented Migration Project
- Voces de la Frontera

As the narrator of the first half of the *Lost Children Archive*, the mother’s dismay is creating an archive that confronts documentation fallacies and pays attention to expulsion, dispossession, violence, and social injustice. However, as readers, it is important to observe that we never get to see her project or her husband’s finished. All we get are glimpses of her thoughts, reinforced by her recurrent attention to the boxes in the car’s trunk. She has access to the trunk and reads some of her husband’s books during the road trip. The repeating presence of the boxes highlights her deep attachment to the act of documentation and speaks to the mother’s role as an
archivist of their story. By engaging with the items of the mobile archive recurrently, she is responsible for documenting their journey and preserving their memories. Her commitment to ensuring their story, along with migrant children, is not lost or forgotten.

Moreover, the boxes symbolize the mother’s attempt to create order and control amidst the chaos and uncertainty of their situation. She manipulates them during the trip, especially at night, because she seeks solace and stability by organizing and revisiting their content. It becomes a ritual of calm and connection to their better past when she feels her family is in crisis and on the edge of disappearing. Additionally, her box (Box V) is portrayed in the novel as less tidy or more disorganized than her husband’s archive. The opposing tidiness of their boxes serves as a visual representation of their divergent approaches to archiving the exploration of memory and documentation. It emphasizes how each engages with their experiences and seeks to shape the road trip narrative. However, the key to this condition can be found at the novel’s end, when the stepson apologizes for messing with the woman’s box order (p. 348).

The boy

The narrative voice changes in part II, after the “Removals” section (pgs. 153-186), where the family observes the migrant children being led onto the plane to be deported. There is a sense of helplessness and frustration in this scene that confronts the harsh realities of immigration policies and their consequences. The woman faces the situation by talking to the children as if they were astronauts, which creates a sense of wonder and imagination amidst the difficulty:

Children force parents to go out looking for a specific pulse, a gaze, a rhythm, the right way of telling the story, knowing that stories don’t fix anything or save anyone but maybe make the world both more complex and more tolerable. And sometimes, just sometimes, more beautiful. Stories are a way of subtracting the future from the past, the only way of finding clarity in hindsight.

The boy is still pointing at the empty sky with his binoculars, so I ask him once again, this time just whispering:

What else do you see, Ground Control? (Luiselli 186, LCA)
Here the mother reflects on the difference between adult and child perspectives, acknowledging that children can inspire their parents to search for different forms of meaning and recognizing the potential of storytelling in making the world tolerable and more pleasant. The idea that stories subtract the future from the past suggests that they help us make sense of the events and create narratives that give meaning to our existence. The final line, “What else do you see, Ground Control?” (p. 186), transports the boy and the girl to a world of adventure and offers a momentary escape from the harsh reality they are witnessing. It is also a metaphorical question directed at her stepson, who observes and interprets the scene through the binoculars he was gifted with for his birthday. It implies he can control and uncover new perspectives as an observer and storyteller. He has the power to discover something extraordinary; therefore, his voice can take control of the narrative after this moment.

Moreover, the question the woman asks before closing the novel’s first part alludes to David Bowie’s song “Space Oddity,” one of the tracks the family listens to repeatedly in the car. The musical piece refers to alienation (becoming an alien) and the lack of communication between an astronaut and the world back on Earth. It depicts Major Tom’s experience of being alone in space and the breakdown in communication with Ground Control. It can be interpreted as a metaphor for the novel’s family and migration crisis. In this scenario, the mother takes the position of the lost space traveler (the alien, in a legal and figurative sense) while her son is stationed at a space agency’s mission control center to provide guidance and support.

David Bowie as Major Tom in the 1969 music video for “Space Oddity,” directed by Mick Rock
The second part of *Lost Children Archive*, “Reenactment,” starts with the boy’s response to the woman: “Calling Major Tom. / Checking sound. One, two, three. / This is Ground Control. You copy me, Major Tom?” (Luiselli 191, *LCA*) The boy, who by now has adopted the pseudo-Apache name Swift Feather, answers as the Ground Control still but creates a sense of ambiguity since the reader does not know if the question that introduces the new narrator is directed to his mother or someone else. He presents his addressee right after by saying: “This is the story of us, and of the lost children, from beginning to end, and I’m gonna tell it to you, Memphis.” (Luiselli 191, *LCA*) The boy’s stepsister has also embraced her new name, Memphis, as part of a round of family renaming. As the children start to inhabit and assume their alternate identities, the novel’s tone shifts from the mother’s analytical realism to a mythical and epic narrative reminiscent of classic children’s tales. Like the Apache children and the migrant refugees, these lost children on their own adventure, leaving behind their family and comfort while entering unknown territories. After this turning point, Valeria Luiselli invites the reader into a more imaginative and symbolic realm: the children’s.

Just over halfway through *Lost Children Archive*, the narrative suddenly shifts from the mother’s point of view to the boy’s. The mother’s ten years old stepson offers another account of the events highlighting meta-discursive reflections on the adult’s projects and archival curation. Through the boy’s perspective, readers gain a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics within the family and the broader themes of documentation and archiving. The boy’s narration reveals his observations and interpretations of the projects the grown-ups undertake, offering a child’s perspective on their motivations and actions.

At the beginning of the boy’s section, he sheds new light on events previously recounted by the mother, explaining his growing frustration with her emotional distance towards him and his sister. After an intense argument, the kid realizes that his parents’ marriage is crumbling, and that their family is on the verge of being torn apart. Faced with the discord, he takes it upon himself to become as significant as the children his mother follows and tries to find Manuela’s daughters as well. One morning, after writing a note and drawing a map that leads to Echo Canyon, he leaves secretly with his stepsister, and both imaginatively inhabit the hardships faced by migrant children: they endure scorching heat, meet hunger, and even ride between train cars like La Bestia—a freight train network that runs through Mexico and is notorious for its use by migrants attempting to reach the United States. In this sense, the children in the back seat take on...
the role of storytellers for the lost children who cannot truly recount their stories. Once again, Luiselli mirrors the previous dilemmas about who has the right to tell others’ stories.

When the boy takes over the narration, he wants to tell the distressing events of how he and his sister got lost in the Southwestern desert, but—aware their parents are going to separate after the trip—he wants the five-year old girl to remember when they were still a family. He explains that their pediatrician once told them that kids do not start building memories of things until they are six, so he needs to keep a record of their history together. “I needed to find a way to help you remember, even if it was only through things I documented for you, for the future. And that’s how I became a documentarist and a documentarian at the same time” (Luiselli 210, LCA). As an archivist, he inherited the methodology from the mother and the father. Therefore, he uses his Polaroid camera to create a visual archive of 24 photos, which makes him a documentarian. With the mother’s recorder, he becomes a documentarist who can tell with the recordings what the pictures cannot (p. 349). This duality reflects the multidimensional nature of documentation and emphasizes the interplay between visual representation and storytelling. The boy’s double role fills the gap between images and words and between his parent’s methodologies, which provides a better understanding of the experiences and emotions documented. Much like the adult’s interest in capturing absent presences, his archive aims to preserve the echoes of a fading family: his family.

At the end of the trip, the boy’s box (Box VII) is limited to Polaroids, which he leaves for his mother and sister to bring home back to NY. They are frozen snapshots of specific moments in their journey, but it is important to note that they are not always clear due to his difficulty learning how to use the camera. The faded images of his archive and even the photos he loses inside of the book Lost Children Elegies, which he forgets on the train that took them from Lordsburg to Bowie (p. 348), show the ephemeral nature of memories and the challenges of preserving the past. Likewise, the recording he makes for his sister using the woman’s machine—and returns to her box afterward—emphasizes the collaborative and interconnected nature of his documentation efforts. The recording becomes another layer of archiving that amplifies the echoes he is hunting. In sum, the boy’s role as an archivist signifies the multifaceted nature of documenting and storytelling. While the adults are more concerned about the explicit forms of their archival practices, he reminds the reader that everyone can observe, document, and create narratives regardless of age or formal role.
Family Archive Exercise:

- Ask each student to select one artifact from their family archives. This could be an old photograph, a letter, a piece of jewelry, a document, or any other item preserved over time.
- Have them write a narrative or reflection about the chosen artifact, exploring the following aspects:
  - Describe the chosen artifact: What is it?
  - When was it created? Who was involved?
  - Share any stories or memories associated with the artifact. Without specific stories, they can reflect on the feelings this artifact evokes.
  - Explain the artifact’s significance to their family and themselves. Reflect on why this piece has been preserved over time and what it represents regarding their family history.
- Have students draw connections between their family archives and the boy’s documentation efforts in the novel:
  - How does their chosen item parallel the boy’s use of Polaroid photos and recordings to capture memories?
  - Discuss whether their family archives serve a similar purpose in preserving memories and history.
- Conclude the activity with a class discussion where students share their chosen artifacts, narratives, and reflections. Facilitate a conversation around the following points:
  - How do family archives contribute to preserving personal history and cultural heritage?
  - Discuss any common themes or emotions that emerged from the artifacts and reflections.
  - Explore how the exercise highlights the universal human impulse to document and remember important moments.
The girl

Lastly, the girl documents (literally) all the echoes she found on the road trip, and her brother helps her write them down. Box VI (pgs. 341-343) is full of echoes and word transcriptions seen through children’s lenses. These communicate an intimate connection to the kid’s own identity and self-expression. The girl’s box is then a repository of written sounds. They are treasured possessions, souvenirs, and personal artifacts that are significant to her. Unlike the other family members’ more structured and curated boxes, hers exhibits individuality and autonomy, allowing her to create her own narrative. The items may not have the same external significance as other documents or photographs used for documenting and building archives. Still, they are intrinsically important to the girl’s understanding of herself and the world. Box VI denotes the child’s agency as an archivist, giving her the power to shape her narrative and construct her version of the memory. Through her box, the girl asserts her voice and way of documenting and archiving her private and emotional landscape. It highlights the significance of personal archives and their role in preserving experiences and identities.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

- Discuss the role of sound in the father’s archiving process and reflect on how sound as a medium can capture cultural memories and stories.
- Think about the significance of the mother’s attachment to the boxes in the car’s trunk and her recurrent attention to them during the road trip. What do the boxes symbolize in terms of her role as an archivist and her commitment to preserving their journey and memories?
• Analyze the image above from Fox News website on the category of Immigration and reflect on how you think the media’s representation of migrants and marginalized groups influences public perceptions and attitudes toward them. Consider the language. How does the choice of words and phrases influence how people perceive these groups? Can you identify any examples of biased language? Reflect on the visual imagery. How do these images influence your perception of their living conditions, struggles, or
contributions to society of migrants? Think about the role of social media. How do platforms like Snapchat, (the old) Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, or Instagram contribute to the spread of certain narratives or perspectives? Have you ever encountered media stories that challenge stereotypes or provide a more nuanced understanding of migrants and marginalized groups? How does the mother in *Lost Children Archive* confronts the sensationalist media, highlighting the importance of responsible storytelling and representation? Finally, can you think of any examples where media coverage has positively changed public attitudes or policies? What factors contributed to these outcomes?

- The boy describes himself as an in-between “documentarian” and a “documentarist.” What does this mean to him? How does his use of photography and recording contribute to his understanding and interpretation of the world around him?

- How does the girl create and curate her own archive and demonstrate her agency as an archivist?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

- Have students individually reflect on their own identities and self-expression through documenting personal “echoes.” Ask them to think about the “echoes” of their home or the school that resonate with them: sounds, objects, phrases, experiences, etc. Like the girl’s Box VI, students should create a writing list of these “echoes” and explain why they are meaningful to them: What memories or emotions do they evoke? How do they contribute to their sense of self and identity? Students need to explain the significance and importance of each echo.

- Divide the students into small groups and provide them with a selection of media examples from newspapers, websites, or news broadcasts that cover a mix of socially urgent topics (for example, immigration, climate change, economic crisis, etc.) and less time-sensitive topics (such as science, historical studies, literary reviews, political column, etc.). Have students analyze each media example and discuss whether it aligns more with the mother’s perspective in the novel—focusing on urgency and representing
marginalized voices—or the father’s—capturing echoes of the past and exploring history. At the end, each group presents their analysis and reasoning to the class.

- Ask students to think about a special trip or moment from their childhood that holds personal significance or had a profound impact on them. Then encourage students to write a short memoir about that specific event, capturing the emotions, thoughts, and sensory details associated with that memory. After writing their stories, students can either share them with a partner or with the class. At the end, encourage a discussion about the power of personal storytelling and how writing can help preserve memories and create connections between the present and the past.

- An alternative to this activity could be the creating a memory soundscape:
  - Instruct students to close their eyes and mentally revisit an important memory of moment of their childhood, focusing on sensory details like sounds, smells, colors, and emotions.
  - In pairs or individually, students record sounds they associate with their chosen childhood memory: ambient sounds, dialogues, music, etc. Students can use recording devices, computers, or their smartphones to create these recordings.
  - Have students write a descriptive narrative of their memory, including sensory details they focused on during their recordings. Have students present their completed memory soundscape, combining the writing and the recording part. After each presentation, briefly discuss the memories that were evoked and the merged use of sound and text to enhance storytelling.

WORKING WITH THE BOXES IN *LOST CHILDREN ARCHIVE*

Box 1 (pg. 34):

- Four Notebooks (7 ¾” x 5”)
  - “On Collecting”
  - “On Archiving”
  - “On Inventorying”
  - “On Cataloguing”
• Ten Books
  o The Museum of Unconditional Surrender
  o Reborn: Journals and Notebooks, 1947-1963
  o As Consciousness is Harness to Flesh: Notebooks and Journals, 1964-1980
  o The Collected Works of Billy the Kid
  o Relocated: Twenty Sculptures by Isamu Noguchi from Japan
  o Radio Benjamin
  o Journal des faux-monnayeurs
  o A Brief History of Portable Literature
  o Perpetual Inventory
  o The Collected Poems of Emily Dickson

• Folder (Facsimile Copies, Clippings, Scraps)
  o The Soundscape
  o Whale Sounds Charts
  o Smithsonian Folkways Recordings World of Sounds
  o “Uncanny Soundscapes”
  o “Voices from the Past”

Box II (pg. 70):

• Four Notebooks (7 ¾” x 5”)
  o “On Soundscaping”
  o “On Acoustemology”
  o “On Documenting”
  o “On Field Recording”

• Seven Books
  o Sound and Sentiment
  o The Americans
  o Immediate Family
  o Ilf and Petrov’s American Road Trip
  o The Soundscape
  o A Field Guide to Getting Lost
o  In the Field: The Art Field of Recording

- Three Compact Discs (Boxed Sets)
  o  Voices of the Rainforest
  o  Lost & Found Sound
  o  Desert Winds

- Folder “About Sound Maps” (Notes, Clippings, Facsimiles)
  o  “Sound Around You” Project
  o  The Soundscape Newsletter
  o  “NYsoundmap”
  o  “Fonoteca Bahia Blanca”

Box III (pg. 110):

- Four Notebooks (7 ¾” x 5”)
  o  “On Reading”
  o  “On Listening”
  o  “On Translating”
  o  “On Time”

- Nine Books
  o  The Cantos
  o  Lord of the Flies
  o  On the Road
  o  Heart of Darkness
  o  New Science
  o  Blood Meridian & All the Pretty Horses & Cities of the Plain
  o  2666
  o  Suite for Barbara Loden
  o  The New Oxford Annotated Bible

- Folder (Musical Scores)
  o  Metamorphosis
  o  Cantigas de Santa Maria
Box IV (pgs. 148-149):

- Four Notebooks (7 ¾” x 5”)
  - “On Mapping”
  - “On History”
  - “On Reenactment”
  - “On Erasing”

- Eight Books
  - *The North American Indian*
  - *From Cochise to Geronimo: The Chiricahua Apache*
  - *Geronimo: His Own Story. The Autobiography of a Great Patriot Warrior*
  - *A Clash of Cultures*
  - *The Horse, the Wheel, and Language: How Bronze-Age Riders from the Eurasian Steppes Shaped the Modern World*
  - *Cochise, Chiricahua Apache Chief*

- One Brochure: “Desert Adaptations (the Sonoran Desert Species)”

- Four Maps
  - New Mexico
  - Arizona
  - Sonora
  - Chihuahua

- One Tape: *Hands in Our Names*

- One Compact Disc: *Echo Canyon*

- Folder (5 Stereographs / Copies)
  - Postcard (!) of Five Men, Ankles Chained
  - Two Young Men Chained
  - San Carlos Reservation, Seven People outside Adobe House
  - Geronimo Holding Rifle
  - Geronimo and Fellow Prisoners on their way to Florida by Train
Box V (pgs. 242-255):

- Boy’s Map
- Humane Borders Map
- Six Migrant Mortality Reports:
  - Huertas-Fernandez, Nuria
  - Arizaga, Baby Boy
  - Hernandez Quintero, Josseline Janiletha
  - Lopez Duran, Rufino
  - Vilchis Puente, Vicente
  - Beltran Galicia, Sofia
- Clipping / Photograph: Objects Found in Migrant Trails in the Desert
- Loose Note: The Meaning of a Map
- Book: *The Gates of Paradise*
- Clipping / Poster: Wanted, Homes for Children
- Note: Homeless Children in NYC in the 19th Century
- Folder (From Brent Hayes Edwards’s Working Bibliography: “Theories of Archive”)
- Book: *The Children’s Crusade*
- Loose Note / Quote: “Children in the Slave Trade”
- Loose Note / Quote: The Dolben’s Act of 1788
- Clipping / Photograph: Geronimo and fellow Prisoners on their way to Florida
- Book: *Le goût de l’archive*
- Loose Note: Euphemisms
- Loose Note / Quote: *Belladonna*
- Loose Note: Words and Displacement
- Book: *Belladonna*
- Scrap / Poem: “Father’s Old Blue Cardigan”
- Box VI (pgs. 341-343):
- Echo Echoes
- Car Echoes
- Insect Echoes
- Food Echoes
- Stranger Echoes
- Leaves Echoes
- Rock Echoes
- Highway Echoes
- Television Echoes
- Train Echoes
- Desert Echoes
- Storm Echoes
- Tooth Echoes
- Box VII (pgs. 353-376):
  - 24 Polaroid Photos

**Box Analysis:**

- **Identity:** Assign each student a novel protagonist—mother, father, boy, or girl—and ask them to analyze the contents of their respective boxes. Have them identify key elements and items that reflect the character’s personality, interests, and experiences. Lastly, get them to discuss the significance of the boxes’ contents in shaping the character’s identity and motivations in the story.

- **Archival Practice:** Have students compare the contents of the different boxes and explore how the items in each box reflect the individual character’s archiving and documenting style, memories, and relationships. Students can analyze the similarities and differences between the characters’ archival practices and what they reveal about their personalities and perspectives.

- **Emotional Connection:** Ask students to reflect on the emotional impact of the items in the boxes. Have them choose one or two that they find particularly powerful or evocative and explain why. Afterward, students may discuss how these items elicit certain emotions and contribute to understanding the characters’ experiences and the novel’s larger themes.
Suggested Questions for Discussion:

- Discuss the importance of the girl’s Box VI in the novel. How does this box differ from the boxes of other family members? What does it represent, and why is it significant to her?
- In what ways do the characters’ archival practices shape their relationships with each other? How does archiving become a means of communication and understanding between family members?
- How does the archival practice of each character (father, mother, boy, and girl) reflect their personalities, experiences, and perspectives?
- Consider the connection between the boxes and the themes of migration and displacement in the novel. How do the characters’ belongings represent their connection to their homeland or their attempt to create a sense of home in a new place? Discuss how the boxes act as physical manifestations of memory, carrying personal histories and cultural heritage.

Close-Reading/Song Exercise:

“Space Oddity” is one of David Bowie’s most famous songs and plays an important role in *Lost Children Archive*.

Circulate copies of “Space Oddity” lyrics among students and ask them to read it, individually or in groups, paying attention to its form and content. Instructors are encouraged to play the song while students work with it.

```
Ground Control to Major Tom
Ground Control to Major Tom
Take your protein pills and put your helmet on
Ground Control to Major Tom
Commencing countdown, engines on
Check ignition and may God's love be with you
This is Ground Control to Major Tom
You've really made the grade
```
And the papers want to know whose shirts you wear
Now it's time to leave the capsule, if you dare
This is Major Tom to Ground Control
I'm stepping through the door
And I'm floating in a most peculiar way
And the stars look very different today
For here am I sitting in a tin can
Far above the world
Planet Earth is blue
And there's nothing I can do
Though I'm past one hundred thousand miles
I'm feeling very still
And I think my spaceship knows which way to go
Tell my man I love him very much, he knows
Ground Control to Major Tom
Your circuit's dead, there's something wrong
Can you hear me, Major Tom?
Can you hear me, Major Tom?
Can you hear me, Major Tom?
Can you hear me, Major Tom?
Can you-
Here am I floating 'round my tin can
Far above the Moon
Planet Earth is blue
And there's nothing I can do (David Bowie)

- Ask students to analyze the lyrics of “Space Oddity” and identify central themes and motifs. They can explore how these themes resonate with the character’s experiences in the novel, particularly regarding their role as archivists.
- Divide students into small groups and ask them to discuss how the ideas of alienation, communication, and exploration are present in both the song and the novel.
• Have students make a playlist, including “Space Oddity,” that they believe would serve as a fitting soundtrack for *Lost Children Archive* and its themes of migration, memory, history, loss, and the power of storytelling. Ask them to explain their song choices and discuss how each song connects to the archivist’s role and the novel's narrative.

• Assign students to choose a character from *Lost Children Archive* and imagine their connection to “Space Oddity.” Ask them to write a 400-words reflection or journal entry from the character’s perspective, exploring how the song relates to their experiences or journey in the novel. Students can discuss the song’s significance in shaping the characters’ emotions and motivations.

**SUGGESTED UNIT AND PROJECT IDEAS**

• Divide the class into groups and assign each a specific topic related to migration, identity, or memory explored in the novel. Instruct them to create an archive on these topics, using various forms of documentation such as written records, photographs, audio recordings, or even multimedia presentations. Ask the students to gather materials from different perspectives and experiences on their chosen topic. Afterward, each group presents their archive to the class, explaining their selection of materials and discussing the importance of diverse forms of documentation.

• Assign students the task of writing a short story or a monologue from the perspective of one of the characters based on the contents of their box. Encourage them to incorporate the items and documents to reveal the character’s thoughts, emotions, and motivations. Students can present their narratives to the class and discuss the insights gained from adopting that point of view.

• Ask students to write a letter or create a recording or video from an archivist's perspective and explain their work. They should discuss the archivist’s mission to preserve and communicate stories and the importance of capturing the human experience.

• Have students imagine themselves as archaeologists uncovering artifacts related to the novel’s themes. Then, ask them how they would create a physical or virtual exhibition to display found objects representing different aspects of the *Lost Children Archive*. 
• Assign students to document their lives for a continuous 30-day period. They can use a combination of written journal entries, photographs, sketches, audio recordings, or any other creative medium they prefer. Encourage them to be open, honest, and reflective during this process. During the project, students should reflect on the ethical implications of representing themselves and others, consider their responsibility as storytellers, and explain how their narratives might impact those who engage with their documentation. At the end, students should write an essay (between 400 and 500 words) discussing their experience throughout the 30 days, their insights, and what they have learned about the power of narratives.

  o Alternative follow-up activity: Have students compile their documentation into a final presentation where they share their experiences and insights with the class. This could be a Power Point or Prezi presentation, a multimedia digital project, an audiovisual diary, or any other creative format they choose.
UNIT 3. IN REENACTMENT: (RE)CONSTRUCTING NARRATIVES

ABOUT THIS UNIT

Reenactment as a form of archival performance recreates historical events and becomes a way of (re)constructing the past. It delves into the idea that it is a representation of history and an active engagement with the archival material and collective memory that can take place through a variety of mediums and modalities. However, while reenacting is often associated with history, it can also be employed to engage with and interpret contemporary events and experiences. In this context, reenactment becomes a means of examining and understanding current social, political, and cultural phenomena.

By embodying and recreating events, Valeria Luiselli’s novel breathes new life into historical and contemporary narratives while inviting critical reflection on the nature of memory and its relationship with history and documentation. In *Lost Children Archive*, reenactment emerges as a powerful tool for understanding and interpreting the complexities of the past and the present. Through the lens of the characters’ experiences, the story navigates the complexities of their own and others’, shedding light on the dynamic process of engaging with archival material, uncovering hidden narratives, and challenging dominant sociopolitical perspectives. Reenactment in the novel, therefore, has the capacity to reconstruct and reimagine both past and present events, enabling the protagonists to engage critically with and reflect upon the world around them. It allows for a multi-layered exploration of the tensions between memory, interpretation, and the construction of a collective understanding.

This unit speaks to the challenges of accurately reconstructing events, aiming to explore how, in Luiselli’s literary work, reenactment becomes a tool for examining and understanding collective memory as well as the present individual standpoints and cultural contexts. The goal is for students to better understand the complexities of (re)constructing the past and the transformative potential of archival performance and storytelling while engaging with the nuances of narrative representation.

“Questioning Narratives,” the first subsection, investigates reenactment as a means of intervention. In *Lost Children Archive*, characters actively shape and defy the narratives surrounding them, which speaks to the potential for reenactment to disrupt established accounts, challenge prevailing sociopolitical perceptions, and bring forward marginalized perspectives.
The second subsection, “Objects and Artifacts,” looks at how objects and artifacts, such as photos, maps, and recordings contribute to the archival performance in the novel. They are an apparatus that evokes memory, shapes narratives, and defies our understanding of reality.

Lastly, “On Writing,” examines literature as a medium for reenactment. It focuses on Luiselli’s literary techniques as well as the transformative potential of storytelling as a means of (re)creating accounts and presenting alternative perspectives on events.

Each subsection is interspersed with various suggested exercises. Options for potential unit projects can be found at the end.

RECOMMENDED SOURCES & AND READINGS

OPEN ACTIVITIES

Imagine you were there

Show students a series of historical photographs depicting significant events or periods. These could include photographs from wars, civil rights movements, or cultural celebrations. In small groups, ask students to choose one photograph and discuss what they think is happening in the image. Then, have them imagine themselves as participants in that event and share how they would feel and what actions they might take. Alternatively, you can provide students with a short passage or description of a historical event or experience from a textbook and ask them to engage their senses and imagine what it would be like to be present at that moment. In both cases, encourage them to consider the emotions, sights, sounds, smells, and feelings associated with the event. After a few minutes of reflection, have students share their thoughts with a partner or their groups. Then ask the following questions to the whole class:

- The US National Park Services Website. “Civil War Reenactments”.

Teaching Lost Children Archive in Wisconsin
Great World Texts: A Program of the Center for the Humanities, University of Wisconsin-Madison
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• How did imagining yourself as a participant in the historical event enhance your understanding of reenactment?
• What are the benefits of reenacting historical events? What can we learn from these experiences?
• What are some of the limitations of reenacting historical events? Can we ever truly experience events that took place in the past?
• In what way did this activity allow you to connect with the experiences of individuals from the past?

Some ideas for sources to find photographs are: Library of Congress Prints & Photographs online catalog, National Archives, or Digital Public Library of America.

Thinking about reenactment

These questions can serve as starting points for class discussions, allowing students to share their initial thoughts, ideas, and perspectives on the concept of reenactment. It can also help you gauge their existing knowledge and understanding, allowing further exploration and deeper engagement with the topic.

• Have you ever heard of or seen a reenactment before? If so, can you describe what it was like?
• What do you think reenactment means? How would you define it in your own words?
• In your opinion, why do you think people participate in reenactments? What might be some of their motivations?
• Can you think of any examples of reenactment in popular culture, such as movies, TV shows, or books? How do these portrayals contribute to our understanding of the past?
• What are some potential challenges or limitations of reenactment to our understanding of the past?
• Do you think reenactment is a valid method for interpreting history? Why or why not?
QUESTIONING NARRATIVES

“The celebration of the founding of white America is not confined to the past events. The practice lives on in a kind of real-life reenactment with very real consequences, in which the reenactors are civilian border patrollers—people who feel that they have a duty to do whatever they can to keep others, and especially non-white others, out of America.”

—Av Tyson Retz, “Historical Reenactment” Article.

In *Lost Children Archive*, the characters engage with reenactment as a means of intervention, disrupting the narratives that shape their understanding of history and the present. Valeria Luiselli challenges dominant accounts perpetuating ideologies and power dynamics through their performances while questioning representations that perpetuate exclusionary practices. Reenactment extends beyond historical events, encompassing contemporary practices as well. It draws attention to the present happenings at the southern border, where civilians and border patrollers adopt the roles of gatekeepers to prevent migrants from coming to the US, and ask us to look at the near past, when the government forced Indigenous peoples to leave their homes. Through their performances, the characters in the novel disrupt established accounts and prevailing sociopolitical perceptions, revealing power dynamics while fostering a more inclusive understanding of collective events.

During the road trip and by recording sounds, the father is set to follow—to recreate—the journey of the Chiricahua Apaches. His project serves as a form of intervention that confronts the widely accepted discourse of the westward expansion and brings attention to silenced experiences. He challenges official narratives by countering them with alternative perspectives, amplifying silent experiences, and humanizing historical events. His documentation and archive process questions the narratives overshadowed by official historical discourses. Along the road, he encourages critical thinking and invites the reader, and his own family, to question history and reevaluate established accounts. A good example of this point is the quote that follows, which takes place when the family is crossing the Appalachians and they notice the trees along the mountain path are covered in kudzu:
My husband explains to the children that kudzu was brought over from Japan in the nineteenth century, and that farmers were paid by the hour to plant it on harvested soil, in order to control erosion. They went overboard, though, and eventually the kudzu spread across the fields, crept up the mountains, and climbed up all the trees. It blocks the sunlight and sucks out all the water from them. The trees have no defense mechanism. From the higher parts of the mountain road, the sight is terrifying: like cancerous marks, patches of yellowing treetops freckle the forests of Virginia.

All those trees will die, asphyxiated, sucked dry by this bloody rootless creeper, my husband tells us, slowing down as we hit a curve.

But so will you, Pa, and all of us, and everyone else, the boy says.

Well, yes, his father admits, and grins. But that’s not the point.

Instructively, the girl then informs us:

The point is, the point is, the point is always pointy. (Luiselli 53, LCA).

In connection to the larger themes in the novel, the husband uses the story of the invasive kudzu plant to reflect on the idea that narratives too can take over and become dominant historical accounts. The father’s acknowledgment of mortality and the girl’s insistence on the “point always being pointy” (p. 53) suggest that the purpose of engaging with history is not merely to highlight the inevitability of mortality or to reach a fixed conclusion. Instead, the focus is on questioning, understanding, and critically engaging with narratives and experiences. It signifies the importance of alternative perspectives. The girl’s remark reinforces that the point of storytelling and engagement with history lies in the ongoing pursuits of understanding and critical reflection rather than in reaching a definitive conclusion. At the same time, the invasive and destructive nature of the kudzu plant, its historical introduction, and its impact on the environment and native communities provide a lens through which we can draw connections to the broader historical context of colonialism and exploitation.

Moreover, the father tells the girl and the boy several stories throughout the novel. These serve as a means of connecting with the children, imparting knowledge about history, and
fostering their imagination. As such, he tells them tales of the Apache, Geronimo, Chief Nana, Chief Loco, and Chief Cochise as they travel across the US. At some point, after the girl inquires if there was any Chiricahua children band, the man tells them about the Eagle Warriors: a band of Apache children who could control the weather (p. 74). According to him, they were almost like gods with supernatural powers. Although the mother is unsure if his partner is telling the truth, she and the kids connect with what he says. He recounts that they were young warriors who lived in Echo Canyon, introducing the place for the first time in the story. In the novel, Echo Canyon holds importance as a symbolic and literal point that connects the characters with historical legacies, explores the convergence of narratives, and represents the echoes of the past while confronting silence/loss and throwing light on the impact of nature. It is there where the family trip ends, and the kids meet their parents after getting lost and encountering other migrant children on their way. Therefore, this moment becomes a space that converges historical and cultural landscapes’ memory, heritage, and complexities.

Reenactment allows for the reexamination of events. Historical reenactment, in particular, is the practice of living history that involves “reconstructing uses, customs, material culture, and aspects of the past based on strictly scientific guidelines to achieve objectives related to cultural dissemination and education” (González-González, Gerardo-Calvo, and Español-Solana). As such, it spans genres, from theatrical and living performances, museum displays, television and film productions, to travelogues and historiographical accounts (Agnew 327).

According to National Geographic Education, reenactment is “an American tradition” that has taken place in public spaces for centuries (Schons). Before the Civil War engagement on reenactments of Revolutionary War scenes, known as “sham fights” or “sham battles” was common. Indeed, George Washington’s army participated in battle reenactments, including one at the second Morristown encampment in New Jersey in May 1780, one of the largest events at the time. During the early and mid-nineteenth century, these mock battles were frequently held to commemorate significant anniversaries of Revolutionary War events, occasionally involving veterans of those battles (Dunkerly). After the Civil War, Union and Confederate veterans recreated daily camp life to share their experiences with friends and family. For instance, the Great Reunion of 1913, marking the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg, saw former soldiers from both sides gather in Pennsylvania for speeches and handshakes, reenacting Pickett’s Charge symbolically.
Union and Confederate veterans shaking hands at reunion to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg, 1913. Library of Congress.

Likewise, sham battles involving Native American people during the 18th and 19th centuries, were simulated or staged during historic anniversaries, exhibitions, or events. On the closing day of the Pan-American Exposition on November 2, 1901, a simulated battle between six American Indian tribes and the United States Infantry (originally in Buffalo) was staged at the Stadium on the exhibition grounds. The spectacle featured approximately 250 Indigenous peoples dressed in traditional attire and adorned with war paint. Roughly half were mounted on spirited horses. The Infantry initiated the attack by charging the Indians, who firmly resisted and managed to drive back the soldiers. Here you can find a video of “Sham battle at the Pan-American Exposition, Part 1 of 2” (Library of Congress).
In the early 20th century, military colleges demonstrated battle tactics through Civil War battle reenactments. During the 1930s, Army National Guard units, US Marines, and military school cadets initiated public displays involving modern military formations, uniforms, and weaponry to meticulously recreate historical battles, often coinciding with the original battle anniversary dates. Additionally, modern reenactment gained momentum during the Civil War centennial in the early 1960s. By then, middle-class prosperity, consumerism, widespread automobile usage, and the commemoration of the conflict’s 100th anniversary converged to reignite enthusiasm both for the war itself and for the meticulous recreation of its pivotal battles. Illustrating this resurgence, on July 21-22, 1961, the National Park Service and the Civil War Centennial Commission collaboratively supported a reenactment of the First Battle of Manassas at the original battleground in Virginia. The event unfolded as a complex ordeal for the organizers, encompassing logistical intricacies, financial challenges, and bad public image. Unforeseen expenses, property damage, and legal responsibilities emerged for the National Park Service due to approximately 2,200 participants and 50,000 spectators thronging into the park each day. The commission also faced public criticism for commemorating a Confederate triumph.
during a period of tension amidst the turmoil of the civil rights movement. Subsequently, today reenactments are forbidden on any property under the jurisdiction of the National Park Service (Jones).


Reenacting allows us to explore parts of American history that are often overlooked, forgotten, or ignored. It also draws connect between historical events our everyday lives. It is a practice that can be imagined in real-time and raises difficult questions about issues that cross temporalities, such as immigration, forced displacement, or state-backed violence, etc. In its many forms, reenactment has evolved into one of the most extensively embraced manifestations of popular history. Maja Mikula argues that this phenomenon is due to the contemporary societal inclination for immediacy and individual engagement (“Historical Re-enactment” 585).

Common exposures to reenactment provide immersive experiences for participants and audiences. Reenactments shape our understanding of the past by allowing us to engage with
history on a personal and tangible level. However, issues such as balancing historical accuracy and entertainment, the potential oversimplification of complex histories, and the lack of accuracy and diversity while representing more than one perspective often arise.

In *Lost Children Archive* “the Wild West reenactments and the myths that fuel them reveal the emotions driving the response to the ‘border crisis,’ and conversely, that the civilian border militias shed light on some of the myths behind reenactment culture” (Retz). In their backseat, the children listen to the broadcast on the radio about the migration crisis, ICE raids, political rages, and family separation. In this context, they start playing games that mirror everything they hear. As the mother and the boy narrate, they immerse themselves in the reenactment of the game. In the vehicle, sometimes they pretend to be Indians fighting cowboys and the Border Patrol (p. 75), and other times, they escape from their current world, transforming into lost children wandering through a desert without the guidance of adults (p. 156). Memphis, the girl, is obsessed with repeating the story of Geronimo dying after falling off his horse, ignoring other information relevant to his death. By doing so, the children challenge the objective historical narrative, offering up their childlike interpretations. This intervention in the story by Memphis is perhaps a way to demonstrate a challenge to parental, received historical, and colonial lenses that might belittle the experiences of migrant children. Their imagination allows them to explore the complexities of child refugees and colonial policies. They confront hardship and despair to invoke the terrifying possibilities that both history and the present hold.

Furthermore, the children in the novel extend their reenactment beyond their car seats and venture their imagination into the “real world.” They adopt the Chiricahua Apache’s identities through self-given names and imaginative games that allow them to immerse themselves in Apache lives and experiences. They also assume the identities of the migrant refugees when they leave their parents’ side. As the kids continue their journey through the (perhaps) fictional desert later in the novel, they embark on a transformative exploration, highlighting the capacity of the young to question, imagine, and challenge the stories that shape their world. Additionally, they confront the narrative constructed by adults, including their mother’s impulse to dismiss their game. The boundaries between fiction and reality become blurred, actively merging their reenactment with their own understanding of history and contemporary issues to question discourses surrounding migration and displacement.
Likewise, the mother’s role in reenactment intertwines with her personal journey of self-discovery, her exploration of collective memory, and her commitment to amplifying marginalized voices. She rediscovers her work’s purpose: “All I see in hindsight is the chaos of history repeated, over and over, reenacted, reinterpreted, the world, its fucked-up heart palpitating underneath us, failing, messing up again and again as it winds its way around a sun” (Luiselli 146, LCA). In so doing, the mother begins to recognize the echoes of history, the cyclical patterns of human behavior, and the ways in which narratives are continuously reinterpreted. She perceives the world as a flawed entity, continuously failing and making mistakes, which leads her to a deeper understanding of the potential of reenactment regarding storytelling.

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

- What are the benefits of and issues of historical reenactments? How do they shape our understanding of the past?
- Are historical reenactments responsible for addressing sensitive or controversial aspects of history, such as violence, discrimination, or colonialism?
- What draws people to participate in historical reenactments? What motivates individuals to recreate historical events and immerse themselves in the past?
- In your opinion, how might technological advancements, such as virtual or augmented reality, change how we experience historical reenactments in the future?
- What distinguishes historical reenactments from other forms of historical interpretation, such as museums, documentaries, or academic research?
- How does reenactment in the novel bring up marginalized perspectives? In what ways does it give voice to silenced or overlooked narratives? In what ways can it give favor to conquering/colonizing populations?
- Discuss the role of storytelling and mythmaking as forms of reenactment in the novel and explain in which way these narratives challenge dominant accounts.
- Discuss the significance of Echo Canyon in the *Lost Children Archive* and its connection to reenactment. How does it serve as a site for reflection, disruption, and the exploration of personal and collective histories?
• Is there a fine line between reenactment and exploitation? If so, in which way does *Lost Children Archive* navigate it?

**Suggested In-Class Activities:**

• Ask students to write a 400-500-word response paper arguing what factors could shape the perspective of a historian, biographer, documentarian, government, or community when it comes to interpreting or documenting the past.

• Divide the students into pairs and assign them different characters from *Lost Children Archive*. Instruct them to create a dialogue between their assigned characters, emphasizing a moment where reenactment challenges established narratives. Encourage them to think critically about their characters’ motivations, perspectives, and the conflicts they may encounter. As a follow-up activity, once the dialogues are complete, instructors may allow each pair to perform role-play in front of the class, promoting active listening and further discussion.

• Present the class with hypothetical “what if” scenarios related to the themes of reenactment and questioning narratives. For example, “What if a character in *Lost Children Archive* decided not to challenge a dominant narrative? How would the story change?” Ask students to reflect on and write their responses to one or more scenarios. Then, give them time to share and discuss their responses.

• Set a one-minute timer and ask students to individually reflect on the impact of reenactment in *Lost Children Archive*. After the minute is up, give each a chance to share one key insight or question that arose during their reflection. Encourage a brief class discussion around these shared insights, focusing on the transformative potential of reenactment and its role in challenging narratives.

• As a class or individually, have students gather popular or scholarly sources on the history of (and myths surrounding) kudzu in the southern United States. Bill Finch’s article “The True Story of Kudzu, the Vine That Never Truly Ate the South” and Laura Kraft’s article “The Life and Lies of Kudzu,” listed in the resources for this unit, are a good place to start. Invite students to engage with the dominant historical and literary accounts of the infamous weed, and to read the father’s explanation of kudzu to the children alongside these popular understandings. Using what they learn about the facts,
myths, and misconceptions about kudzu, encourage students to return to the passage and question dominant accounts and storytelling around the plant, the South, immigration, “invasiveness,” and other cultural themes they see emerging. How might they use this example to challenge storytelling and dominant accounts repeated by the characters? By Luiselli? By others in literature and popular science?

In-Class Photo Analysis Activity:
Divide the class into groups of 2-3 students and circulate a different copy of the following reenactment photographs to each group.

![Treaty of the Holston Reenactment, TN. Indian Creek Productions, Inc. Trail of the Trail.](image-url)
Battle of Bushy Run Reenactment, PA. *Reenactment Supplies.*


Instruct students to analyze the photograph they were assigned and search information online by considering the following questions:

- What event is being reenacted? Can you identify the time period?
- Who are the participants in the photograph? What roles are they portraying?
- What elements in the picture indicate historical accuracy or inaccuracy?
- Are there any visual cues that suggest biases or certain perspectives?
- What emotions or messages does the photograph convey?

Have students provide their own interpretation of the photos and share their observations with their group. Ask them to reflect on what they learned about interpreting historical reenactment photographs, including any challenges or surprises they encountered.
Then, as a class, encourage students to share their thoughts and lead a group discussion, focusing on the biases, authenticity, and representation of reenactment events. Some questions that can be helpful for the conversation, include:

- What insights did you gain from analyzing the photographs?
- How do you think biases or historical inaccuracies impacted your interpretations?
- How might reenactment shape public perceptions of historical events?
- What ethical considerations should be taken into consideration when reenacting?

Close Reading Exercise:

Circulate copies of the following fragment to students and ask them to read it, individually or in groups, paying attention to its form and content.

I asked Ma what she thought was going to happen to the children in the airplane. She said she didn’t know, but said that if those lost children hadn’t got caught the way they got caught, they would all have spread out across the country, and she was showing the big map from her seat like always, and moving her finger around it like she was drawing with her fingertip. All of them would have found a place to go, she said. And when I asked her where to, where would they have gone to, she said she didn’t know where, exactly, didn’t know which dots on the map exactly, but they would have all gone somewhere to live in different houses with different families. Gone to schools? I asked. Yes. And playgrounds? Yes. And parks and all the rest? Yes. (Luiselli 193, LCA)

- Ask students to analyze this quote concerning reenactment and challenging narratives critically. Some questions that may be a good starting point, include:
  - How does this quote reflect the idea of reenactment as a means of intervention in the story?
How does the mother’s response challenge the dominant narrative surrounding the lost children in the airplane?

What does this quote suggest about the transformative potential of reenactment in giving voice to marginalized perspectives?

In what ways does the mother’s uncertainty about the exact destination challenge established accounts and open possibilities for diverse narratives?

- Encourage students to closely examine the language and literary devices used in the quote to support their analysis. Prompt them to identify specific words, imagery, or metaphors that convey the themes of reenactment and challenging narratives. How do these choices enhance the argument being made and contribute to broader ideas in the novel?

- Facilitate a class discussion where students can share their insights and interpretations of the quote. Encourage them to engage in respectful dialogue, building upon each other’s ideas and perspectives. Prompt them to consider the implications of reenactment and challenging narratives in shaping our understanding of history, memory, and marginalized experiences.

- In the quote, the mother imagines a different outcome for the lost children, suggesting they would have gone somewhere to live in different houses with different families. How does this parallel the boy’s actions in the novel when he tells stories to his sister while they are traveling alone through the desert?

**OBJECTS AND ARTIFACTS**

“Maybe any understanding, especially historical understanding, requires some kind of reenactment of the past, in its small, outward-branching, and often terrifying possibilities.”


In the realm of storytelling and the construction of narratives, certain objects and artifacts carry the power to become apparatuses that evoke memory, shape, and defy our understanding of reality, and call upon the past. In *Lost Children Archive*, photographs, maps, recordings, books, boxes, and other archival material invoke a connection to the past while challenging present
perceptions. These items serve as conduits that transport us to different times, places, and perspectives. They act as triggers, summoning personal and collective memories and stirring dormant emotions. In other words, they can construct and reshape narratives. Our perception of reality is challenged and expanded, inviting us to question established recounts and be open to new possibilities.

Objects serve, therefore, as tangible, and symbolic elements that enhance the authenticity and immersive nature of performance in the process of reenactment. They act as catalysts, prompting imagination and facilitating deeper engagement with the recreated past and present. This is to say, they provide a material connection to the recreated historical and cultural context, enhancing the participants’ connection and comprehension of the narrative. In exploring memory, narrative, and reality, objects and artifacts in the novel navigate and confront prevailing sociopolitical perceptions while embracing the transformative potential of archival performance.

Polaroid photos, for instance, act as visual stimulus, transporting characters and readers to specific moments in time. As Susan Sontag stated, “Photographs really are experience captured, and the camera is the ideal arm of consciousness in its acquisitive mood” (2). Photographs make up and thicken environments with frozen frames that capture fleeting moments. Just a single image can unlock a floodgate of memories and emotions associated with the captured moments. In *Lost Children Archive*, photos bridge the gap between past and present and contribute to a more nuanced comprehension of the character’s experiences. Through them, reenactment becomes not only an intellectual exercise but also a sensory and emotional journey in which the reader can participate by looking at the Polaroids pictures included in the last box at the end of the book (pgs. 353-376).

Prior to their departure from New York, the woman gives the boy a Polaroid camera for his tenth birthday. This tool will become instrumental in documenting the events and encounters they experience on their journey. At first, he grapples with understanding the workings of the camera. As he gradually masters its operation, the boy embraces the power of capturing moments and preserving memories through the lens of the machine. One of the noticeable features of Polaroid photographs is their instant development, giving a physical representation of a specific time and place almost immediately. The characters use these photos to document their journey and the places and people they encounter along the way: motels with Elvis Presley’s pictures hanging on the walls, signs of Geronimo City limits, the Chiricahua Apache cemetery, the
children playing, farms, Old Western towns, etc. They are artifacts that enable us to gather a visual archive supporting their experiences.

Polaroid Photo of the boy and the girl taken by the mother. LCA, p. 353 (Box VII).

By engaging with the Polaroids, the characters and the readers actively immerse themselves in the reconstruction of the journey, triggering a deeper connection to the experiences the book creates. Moreover, in the novel, the photos function as tangible symbols of personal and collective history. They are the physical manifestation of memories and stories, representing moments worth preserving, sharing, and keeping—most of the time inside other books. For example, when the boy first attempts to take a picture and the image comes out creamy white, the woman draws a parallel between the photo and his family, interpreting it as he was documenting their uncertain and blurry future instead of the present (p. 38). In another instance, she theorizes/jokes that maybe the boy’s pictures do not come out clear because what he is trying to photograph are echoes, ghosts that are not there (pgs. 55-57). As the mother and the boy—the
two narrators of the novel—handle and exchange these Polaroids, they engage in storytelling and memory-making that recreates the narratives associated with each image and the novel’s plot. Capturing and revisiting them shapes and defines their (and the reader’s) understanding of the road trip and the people they meet.

Polaroid In-Class Activities:

- Select some Polaroid photos that appear in *Lost Children Archive* (Box VII) and ask students to analyze them individually as symbols or metaphors that represent larger themes in the novel and discuss the emotions, themes, and possible narrative behind the images. Then, have students write short response-essays explaining their interpretations.
- Circulate Polaroid photos from the novel (Box VII) and ask students to arrange them, individually or in small groups, on a large poster or board to create a visual representation of the novel. Each student’s composition may differ based on their interpretation of the novel and their individualized approach allows for diverse perspectives and discussions about the story’s various layers of meaning. Once the visual representation is complete, you can discuss why certain photos were placed together in class. As a follow-up activity, teachers may ask the students to individually write a reflection, as a form of self-assessment, explaining the reasoning behind their choices, discussing the connections they see between photos, and elaborating on the themes they believe are represented.
- Have students choose a Polaroid photo from Box VII and create a soundtrack representing the soundscape and narrative they associate with that image. They can select songs, instrumental pieces, or sound effects that best capture the photo’s mood. At the end, students can present their interpretation to the class.

Like the polaroids, maps in *Lost Children Archive*, with their intricately drawn lines and symbols, offer a visual representation of space and ignite our curiosity to explore uncharted territories. They shape the geography and the narratives contained therein while confronting their own fixed nature. Maps can challenge preconceived notions and disrupt established narratives by exposing gaps in representation and subverting dominant cartographic conventions. They, therefore, enable the characters and readers in the novel to engage with the physical landscape.
and chart their journey. They provide a sense of orientation that grants us the opportunity to navigate space. Through their use, the reenactment process becomes grounded in a material representation of the physical world, enhancing the legitimacy and immersive nature of the experience. Furthermore, as the characters trace their journey, maps become repositories of memories and experiences, inviting us to reflect on each location’s significance and role within the broader narrative.

In addition to their navigational and mnemonic functions, maps also shape and influence the storytelling and interpretation of events. They provide a framework for understanding the spatial relationships between different locations, highlighting connections, interdependencies, and interpretations. Engaging with the maps prompts one to consider each place’s historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts, deepening the reenactment process. For example, when the boy narrates how life was before their trip, when they were still a family, he says: “That was the time we were together even when we were not, because that was the time we all lived inside the same map. We stopped living in that map when we left on the road trip, and even though inside the car we were sitting so close together all the time, it felt like we were the opposite of being together” (Luiselli 193, LCA). The idea of living inside the same map suggests that they were all situated in a shared understanding of their place in the world, both physically and emotionally. It symbolizes a time when they felt connected and cohesive, despite each family member’s experiences.

With his youthful imagination and creativity, the boy engages with maps in a unique, hands-on, and artistic way that only his sister seems to observe and understand. He draws “finger-maps” of the stories his father tells them (p. 205), reenacting the history of Geronimo’s band on the back of the driver’s seat: arrows pointing, arrows shooting, whooshing from horseback, etc. Before running away, he also sketches the map of he and his sister’s planned route, based on one of the maps in the mother’s box (pgs. 238-239). Through his cartographical representations, the boy connects with people around him: the mother, the father, and the sister. At the same time, he claims a sense of agency with his creations and expresses a desire for connection with both the past and the present. Maps for him are a powerful and poignant expression of his individual perspective and experience that connect with the book’s larger narrative. They help him to capture the emotional and imaginative aspects of the trip, emphasizing the importance of storytelling and reenactment of the world around him.
By contrast, the father prefers to use GPS devices for navigation during the road trip whereas the mother elects to use paper maps and avoids technology as much as possible. Even when they get lost, she resists using technology. This contrast between the use of physical maps and GPS exhibits a broader thematic strain in the novel between their two different ways of understanding and experiencing the world. The mother’s approach aligns with a more introspective and emotionally connected exploration of place and memory, while the husband’s methods can be considered a more pragmatic and goal oriented. Their differences can be further observed when the family arrives at the airport near Artesia to witness how unaccompanied minors are deported. The woman shakes while she observes the children boarding the plane parked on the runaway; however, the man lights a cigarette and asks if he can record some sound (pgs. 181-182). At some point she forgets her research and hits the mesh fence, screaming, and hurling insults to the officers that are escorting the kids. She doesn’t stop until her husband holds her tight: “Not an embrace but a containment” (p. 183). His actions in this scene suggest that he prioritizes maintaining control over the situation and his emotions, while hers highlight her deep emotional connection and introspective exploration of the places and experiences around her. This moment not only illustrates the differences between the two but also symbolizes a broader tension present throughout the novel between emotional engagement and practicality, empathy and efficiency, introspection and goal achievement.
GPS Navigation of the key places the family visits in the novel. [Google Maps]

Map In-Class Activity:

- Have students explore different routes using [Google Maps] for a fictional road trip that starts in Wisconsin, like the one in *Lost Children Archive*. Encourage them to explore other routes, road options, and potential stops along the way that might be relevant to the novel’s themes.
- Ask students to describe the advantages and disadvantages of using GPS navigation versus traditional paper maps.
  - The advantages of GPS might include real-time updates, turn-by-turn directions, and convenience. The disadvantages might include reliance on technology, potential distractions, and inaccuracies.
  - The advantages of traditional paper maps might include a tactile experience, no reliance on technology, and a broader understanding of the overall route. The disadvantages might include difficulty with real-time updates and potential confusion.
• Ask students to reflect on how the navigation preferences in the novel might influence the characters’ experiences and interactions during the road trip and invite students to consider how their own navigation preferences might reflect their personalities and attitudes.
  o Have students research and present about a key point of interest they identified along their fictional road trip route.

Besides photos and maps, audio recordings also serve as a reenactment apparatus that captures the essence of the road trip, preserves stories, keeps memories alive, and challenges conventional notions of documentation. Through them, *Lost Children Archive* delves into the intricacies of understanding the past and the power of storytelling in shaping our connection to history and the world around us. The collection of sounds and voices captured by the father, the mother, the boy—and by the girl when she compiles echoes in her box—function as a form of documentation that allows them to relive moments, immersing the characters and the readers in the sensory details of their travels. Moreover, they become vessels for preserving and sharing stories and memories.

**Suggested Questions for Discussion:**

• Explain the significance of Polaroid photographs in *Lost Children Archive* and how they function as reenactment apparatuses. Pay attention to the form in which Luiselli enhances the reader’s connection to the characters’ experiences and their journey.

• Speak about the families’ various approaches to maps. How does each perspective reflect the motivations of the characters and their attitudes towards reenactment?

• Reflect on the quote: “That was the time we were together even when we were not because that was the time we all lived inside the same map” (*LCA* 193). How does living inside the same map symbolize a sense of connection and cohesion for the protagonists?

• Explain the role of maps as both physical representations and emotional anchors in *Lost Children Archive*.

• Discuss the way in which photographs, maps, and recordings contribute to the construction and reshaping of narratives throughout the novel.
• Can you think of more objects and artifacts in Luiselli’s book that work as reenactment apparatuses?
• Think about your experiences with physical items that have personal or cultural significance. How do they evoke memory, shape narratives, or challenge your understanding of reality? How might you relate this to the role of objects and artifacts in *Lost Children Archive*?

**Suggested In-Class Activities:**

• Have students bring in a small box or container from home to create a “memory box.” Inside the boxes they may place objects or artifacts that have a personal meaning for them. Each student can take turns sharing their memory box with the class, explaining the stories associated with each item to their classmates. Ultimately, speak about how these objects evoke memories and shape students’ narratives.
• Bring random objects to class inside a box and ask students to take turns picking one. Each object should be a starting point for storytelling, and students should create fictional or personal narratives based on them. This activity aims to prove that objects can be catalysts for storytelling and memory-making.
• Ask students to bring a blank map of a place with personal significance or provide one. This can be a map of places such as their hometown, a favorite vacation spot, a significant historical location, the state of Wisconsin, etc. Then, ask them to represent memories, experiences, and stories associated with the place using symbols, colors, stickers, or sketches. Afterward, students share their maps with the class and discuss the connection between cartography and the shape of narratives.

**In-Class Character Analysis:**

This activity aims to analyze the characters in *Lost Children Archive* by examining the objects and artifacts of the novel. The goal is to explore how these serve as reenactment apparatuses, shaping the characters’ narratives and understanding of reality by using critical analysis.
• Divide the class into small groups and assign them a main character: the father, the mother, the boy, or the girl.

• Ask each group to create a list of objects and artifacts associated with their assigned character, for example, maps, Polaroid photos, recording devices, etc. They should be items that shape the character’s journey, experiences, and understanding of the world around them.

• Ask each group to discuss and analyze the significance of each object for their character. These are some questions that may help you to guide their thoughts:
  o Why did you choose those objects?
  o How does each item contribute to the character’s understanding of their journey and place in the world?
  o How do the artifacts influence their interactions with others and their development?
  o What role do they play in the reenactment portrayed in Valeria Luiselli’s story?

• Have each group present their lists and evaluation to the class, focusing on the novel’s layers of meaning and emotional depth. Emphasize the connection between the characters and their objects regarding reenactment and memory-making.

• Have a class discussion about the characters’ interactions with the objects and how this reflects their perspectives and attitudes in their journey. Pay attention to what the objects reveal about the character’s desires, motivations, and emotional states. You could also examine how they are catalysts for storytelling and memory-making in Lost Children Archive.

ON WRITING

“The book presents truth-telling as a commodity, and it questions the exchange value of truth presented as fiction, and conversely, the added value of fiction when it’s rooted in truth.”

—Valeria Luiselli, Lost Children Archive, 84.

In Lost Children Archive, Valeria Luiselli blurs the boundaries between truth and fiction, challenging the notion of truth and historical perspective. By intertwining reality and fantasy, the
The writer explores the authenticity and reliability of narrative construction while prompting readers to reconsider the conventional limits of storytelling. This blending acknowledges that even fictional narratives can carry valuable truths. As such, the literary work becomes part of a reenactment system that presents alternative perspectives that differ from official or traditional accounts and invite critical thinking.

The novel is structured with different subheadings: “Departure,” “Family Lexicon,” “Family Plot,” “Inventory,” “Covalence,” “Foundational Myths,” “Mother Tongues,” “Time,” “Teeth,” “Tongue Ties,” “Procedures,” “Joint Filing,” “Alone Together,” “Itemization,” “Archive,” “Apacheria,” “Pronouns,” “Cosmologies,” “Passing Strangers,” “Samples & Silences,” “Future,” etc. This segmentation creates a secondary narrative that can be read as a collection of pieces that rearrange the story. At the same time, most of them are repeated through different sections of the novel, with slightly reconfigured or identical names. For example, “Joint Filing” does not have the same interpretation at the beginning—when the mother remembers how they became a family—as it does when it appears later in the novel, when the marriage is in crisis. Similarly, “Time” and “Teeth” in the first part do not hold the same meaning for the woman as they do in the boy’s version of the events, “Time & Teeth.”

Repetition and word variation in *Lost Children Archive* align with the idea of reenactment the novel portrays. It stresses the non-linearity of narratives as unfixed concepts that can be revisited, reshaped, and retold from different angles. As such, Luiselli creates a sense of connection and continuity that recognizes stories can be reframed and reimaged depending on their context, storyteller, and recipient. It suggests that storytelling is an ongoing process that develops and changes over time. Just as historical events and experiences can be reinterpreted, the novel asks readers to reconsider the significance of each subheading and the implications of each subheading’s framework considering later events or revelations in the novel. Additionally, the story’s configuration—with titles and headlines that emulate an archive system—contributes to the accumulation of meaning that derives from repeated attention and reshuffling.

Moreover, the book’s second part is entitled “Reenactment” (pgs. 186-293). The boy narrates this section, which includes the sections “Deportations,” “Maps & Boxes,” “Box V,” “Continental Divide,” and “Lost.” These names stress the centrality of reenactment. They imply that the characters’ reenactments of memories, events, and cultural narratives play an essential
role in the story. The titles of the subsections also hint at the different layers and multiple natures of reenactment as it unfolds.

Luiselli’s novel does not adhere to a fixed literary structure with a clear beginning, middle, and end. The author underscores that truth is not fixed by presenting a different organization of the storyline. This reinforces the multiplicity and subjectivity of story-making, emphasizing the circularity of the discourse. The refugee children, immigration border policies, and historical injustices appear as tales of ongoing systemic oppression that should be reexamined and retold from different perspectives to fight against collective numbness and amnesia. This is one of the many reasons why the kids repeatedly ask how the events will conclude, in both *Lost Children Archive* and *Tell Me How It Ends*. They never get a satisfactory answer.

Nonfiction books and literature are essential to the plot of *Lost Children Archive*. Through them, the characters navigate a complex web of stories and memories, embracing perspectives, biases, and the fluidity of truth. In the novel, books are a medium for reenactment that reinforces the power of literature to challenge dominant histories and perspectives (see the information on *Lost Children Elegies* in Unit 1). The act of creating a story within the main narrative allows Luiselli to challenge established accounts and present alternative versions of both historical and current events. The reimagined children’s crusade and its combination of literary influences, in essence, reinforces the transformative potential of storytelling.

In “Allegory” (pgs. 83–86), the mother describes walking into a book club taking place in a bookstore as if they were spectators breaking in the second act of a theater play (p. 83). The scene is described through a quotidian repetition of performers that sounds like a graduate student seminar. The woman finishes her observation of the meeting with one last thought: “The bewildering consensus among them seems to be that the value of the novel they are discussing is that it is not a novel. That it is fiction but also it is not” (Luiselli *LCA*, 85). This scene exemplifies that the value of novel—and literature—resides in the convergence of fiction and non-fiction and its transformative potential. In addition, the comparison with a theater play introduces a contrast between performance and authenticity, raising questions about the genuineness of the discussion.

In the same way actors on a stage portray characters, plots, and emotions that differ from their lives, the book club participants engage in a performative analysis that seems to lack genuine emotion. This creates a sense of distance and detachment between the book club
participants and the novel they discuss. They do not seem to embrace the book’s power to provoke real emotions and introspection. As such, Luiselli invites readers to consider the ways in which we approach and interpret literature and the importance of embracing its transformative capacity.

Books, whether in the form of physical copies that the adults bring with them, or audiobooks that the family listens to during the road trip, serve as vessels for recreating experiences, sharing stories, and shaping the character’s understanding of the world. In the car, the mother and the father first expose the children to *The Road* (2006) but soon realize is too bleak for the kids. However, they cannot escape its narrative and every time the phone connects to the car, the speakers start reproducing Cormac McCarthy’s novel:

“When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold night . . .,” says the voice of the man in the car speakers, every time, when I connect my phone to the sound system. I guess it’s because that book is at the top of the playlist, but I can’t figure out why it just starts playing by itself, like some diabolical toy (Luiselli 90-91, *LCA*)

The post-apocalyptic book describes the arduous odyssey of a father and his young son as they traverse a devastated landscape in a world that has been ravaged by an unspecified disaster that has wiped out all forms of civilization and nearly all living beings. In place of this story, the parents choose to play William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies* (1954), a story of a group of British boys who are stranded on a deserted island after their plane crashes and create their own society. The novel delves into themes of civilization vs. savagery, the loss of innocence, the inherent capacity for cruelty within human beings, and the struggle between order and chaos. Additionally, Luiselli employs this literary selection to engage in a conversation with classic literary works, crafting a fresh perspective on societal organization and its fundamental principles. *Lost Children Archives*’ pages also include references to Juan Rulfo’s *Pedro Páramo* (1955). This piece of classic Mexican literature narrates the story of Juan Preciado, who, fulfilling his dying mother’s wish, embarks on a journey
to meet his father in the town of Comala. There he discovers a ghost town, populated by spectral characters.

These three literary works “makes a troika of patron texts, guiding and drawing this novel onward: lost children (Golding), a last child (McCarthy), and the ghosts of the dead (Rulfo)” (Wood). In the novel, this intertextual approach resonates with the boy, who internalizes themes of adversity, endurance, and survival in their pages. For example, when the girl complains of the complexity of *The Lord of the Flies*: “He tells her that *Lord of the Flies* is a classic, and she needs to understand the classics if she wants to understand anything about anything” (Luiselli 90, *LCA*). Moreover, the inclusion of well-known literary pieces allows the reader to engage with timeless themes and motifs while offering a fresh perspective on the interconnectedness of human experiences across different narratives. The convergence of stories offers a multilayered approach to societal dynamics that, among others, confront individualism vs. collectivism, (im)morality, and (i)rationality.

Additionally, the presence of physical books, carefully selected and packed in boxes, adds a sense of tangibility while suggesting a deliberate effort to engage with their narratives and carry them into their unknown journey. Listening to stories in the vehicle or before bed is also a collective action that immerses the characters in different worlds and realities that the boy and the girl ultimately make come true with their imagination. Lastly, and beyond her research project, the mother’s habitual action of reading and recording fragments of books throughout the novel speaks to her desire to capture and revisit specific moments and preserve these narratives. In so doing, she actively participates in the reenactment of storytelling and highlights the idea that literature, too, is dynamic; it accumulates and evolves, much like a road trip.

**Suggested Questions for Discussion:**

- Discuss the connection between the book’s structure, which emulates an archive system, and the ways in which meaning is made through the repetition and reshuffling of language and events. Do you find this narrative structure successful in its attempt to
reinforce the idea that stories are multifaceted and subject to reinterpretation? Why or why not?

• How does Valeria Luiselli’s use of subheadings and repetition contribute to the idea of reenactment and challenge conventional limits of storytelling?
• Is Luiselli’s use of subheadings and repetition doing something else? If so, what?
• Unpack the role of books and literature in the novel as vessels for recreating experiences and shaping the characters’ understanding of the world.
• What themes are explored in The Lord of the Flies? In which way do you think these parallel (or not) the events of Lost Children Archive?
• How does the intertextual approach—involving specifically The Road, The Lord of the Flies, and Pedro Páramo—contribute to the novel’s exploration of societal dynamics and human experiences?
• How does the novel’s narrative structure—without a clear beginning, middle, and end—contribute to the portrayal of truth and subjectivity? How do you believe this approach might challenge ongoing systemic oppression?
• In what ways does the blending of reality and fantasy in the novel emphasize the value of fictional narratives in challenging power and conveying truths?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

• Divide the students into small groups of 3-5 and instruct them to focus on the list of subheadings that appear in Lost Children Archive. Ask each group to discuss and analyze their assigned subheading as if they were literary critics exploring their various perspectives and meanings. Have them compare the repetition of words and composed names that appear more than once in the novel and note any variations or changes in their meanings. Then, instruct students to discuss the significance of these variations in connection to how they contribute to reenactment and the way the novel examines a multitude of perspectives. As a class, have a broader discussion about the impact of these names on the narrative structure of the novel and their understanding of the story. Encourage students to focus on the larger topics depicted in the novel, such as truth, memory, social justice, and the fluidity of storytelling.
• Select a scene or event from the novel and have students reenact the scene as a dramatic reading or performance, adapting the dialogue and narration as needed.

• Have students create a new story that follows the idea of reenactment and imagine what happens to the characters after the novel ends, once the mother goes back to NYC. Each student should contribute a section of the narrative. The goal here is to avoid creating a linear plot, and rather to see how different points of view and styles can come together to form a cohesive whole.

• Invite students to create their own “Foundational Myths” to explain the origins of a contemporary phenomenon, such as the rise of a popular social media platform, the invention of a new technology, or the beginning of a cultural or literary trend. These myths should be short compositions (around 300-500 words) that help students examine how reenactment and storytelling techniques shape these narratives.

**Close-Reading Exercise:**
Circulate copies of the following fragment to students and ask them to read it, individually or in groups, paying attention to its form and content. Have students circle keywords and underline main ideas.

I open the *Diaries* again, at random: “My doubts stand in a circle around every word, I see them before I see the word.”

I have never asked a bookseller for a book recommendation. Disclosing desires and expectations to a stranger whose only connection to me is, in abstract, the book, seems too much like Catholic confession, if only a more intellectualized version of it. Dear bookseller, I would like to read a novel about the banal pursuit of carnal desire, which ultimately brings unhappiness to the ones who pursue it, and to everyone else around them. A novel about a couple trying to rid themselves of each other, and at the same time trying desperately to save the little tribe they have so carefully, lovingly, and
painstakingly created. They are desperate and confused, dear bookseller; don’t judge them. (Luiselli 85, LCA)

After reading the passage, instructors can ask students to write a 1-2 sentences summary of the passage and identify the central argument the author is making by answering the following:

- What are we, as readers, meant to take away from reading this fragment?
- What is going on?
- What is the logic by which this text makes its point?
- Who is speaking?
- What is the narrator saying, and in what context?
- What does the quote “My doubts stand in a circle around every word” suggest about the act of writing and the author’s relationship with their words? Why is this quote important (or not) within the novel?
- Who is “the tribe” the narrator alludes to?
- How does the text contribute to the broader themes of the novel?
- In which way do doubts shape the act of reenactment in writing, storytelling, and memory in this passage? How might doubts influence the creation and interpretation of narratives?
- Why do you think the character is reluctant to ask a bookseller for a recommendation? Why do they compare it with act of confession in the context of the Catholic religion?
- Explain in which way ideas from this passage connect to the idea of reenactment in writing and reading.

UNIT ACTIVITIES AND PROJECT IDEAS

- Design a time capsule with your class that captures the present and includes artifacts, writings, and multimedia elements that represent the students’ experiences and perspectives of current socio-political events, such as immigration policies and debates, climate change, racial and ethnic tensions, mass surveillance and privacy concerns, political polarization, etc. Each student can contribute with an item in the format and
media of their choice: creative pieces, letters, drawings, short stories, videos, audio, songs, interviews, photographs, objects, etc. Have students include a brief description and explain how their contribution can be a form of reenactment for future generations.

- As a class, students can create a collaborative audio drama based on a contemporary social or political issue, such as migration and border policies, displacement, climate change, racism, etc. Have students write scripts, perform voice acting, and add sound effects to reenact scenes that explore different perspectives on the chosen topic. This activity aims to display the power of storytelling and reenactment to address difficult issues. Some ideas for a sound database are: Free Sound, Pixabay, or Mixkit. Some free audio recording software ideas are BandLab, Audacity, or Reaper—Audacity is recommended for its ease of use, while BandLab and Reaper include more professional features.

- Provide students with a set of Polaroid cameras and film or digital cameras that can mimic the Polaroid aesthetic. Divide the class into small groups and assign each a specific section or theme from Lost Children Archive. Ask each group to select scenes, characters, or events in the novel that best represent their assigned section or theme. Then, have students stage and capture Polaroid photos that depict these moments, using props and simple settings to recreate scenes. Once the photos are developed (if using actual Polaroid cameras), ask each group to arrange them on a large poster or board to create a visual storyboard of their assigned section or theme. Finally, ask students to individually write a small reflective essay explaining their photo choices, the emotions conveyed, and how the visuals connect to the novel’s themes. Some ideas of themes that teachers can assign, include: family dynamics, migration and displacement, soundscapes, language and communication, literature, cultural identity and heritage, loss and grief, borders and boundaries, memory, or the power of objects. Ask each group to present their storyboard to the class, explaining their photo choices, the emotions conveyed, and how the visuals connect to the novel's themes.

- Ask students to individually research information about The Road, The Lord of the Flies, and Pedro Páramo and choose the one novel that resonates with them the most. Then instruct them to identify a theme, concept, or idea from the chosen book that they find
compelling. For example, if they chose *The Lord of the Flies*, they might focus on the themes of civilization vs. savagery or the loss of innocence. Once they do this, ask the class to find sections—characters, events, situations, etc.—of *Lost Children Archive* that relate to their choice. Then have students write a short creative piece (such as a vignette, monologue, or dialogue) that depicts that connection. They should weave the theme of their choice seamlessly into the novel’s context, allowing it to highlight the characters’ motivations, actions, experiences, or emotions during the road trip. After completing the creative writing piece, students should write a brief reflection explaining their creative choices:

- Why did they choose that novel and theme?
- How did connecting the themes enhance their understanding of the novel?
- What nuances did they discover about the characters, situations, or themes?

At the end, create an opportunity for students to share their pieces with the class and encourage classmates to provide constructive feedback. This could be done through readings, presentations, or small group discussions. Finally, conclude the activity with a class discussion where students discuss the various themes and connections explored in the pieces.
UNIT 4. BROWSING THE BORDER

ABOUT THIS UNIT

Throughout *Lost Children Archive*, Valeria Luiselli explores the complexities of the borderlands by examining their challenges and how historical events impact contemporary dynamics. Since the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) ended the US-Mexico War (1846–1848), of which Mexico yielded 55% of its territory, the Mexico-US border has taken shape (Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas). Yet, this terrain is not a simple physical barrier meant to regulate who and what crosses. It also forms a distinct economic and cultural region.

This unit aims to explore the socio-historical context of the US-Mexico border, delving into the complexities and legacies that shape this contested space to gain a deeper understanding of the human impact of borders and the resilience of those navigating them.

“Crossing Borders” exemplifies how artists have delved into the subjects of borders and borderlands within their creative endeavors. The second subsection, “Between Borders,” shows the contrast between the notions of border, borderlands, and *la frontera*. The third subsection, “Shaping the Border,” delves into the historical roots of the borderlands and outlines how the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo led to the reconfiguration of the territory between the US and Mexico.

All the subsections are interspersed with various suggested exercises. Potential unit project ideas can be found at the end.

RECOMMENDED SOURCES & AND READINGS

- Dodge, Robert V. *Which Chosen People? Manifest Destiny Meets the Sioux: As Seen by Frank Fiske, Frontier Photographer*. Algora Publishing, 2013,


• O’Sullivan, John. “Annexation,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, 1845, pgs. 5-6, 9-10.


**OPEN ACTIVITY**

**Reflection circle**

Borderlands refer to geographical regions along the boundaries between two distinct countries. Although borders can physically define them, they are more than dividing lines. Borderlands are spaces where cultures, languages, and traditions blend and influence one another. As such, they are rich in history and are defined by complex sociopolitical and cultural frameworks such as migration, conflict, trade, resilience, music, and literature.

After explaining what borderlands are, form a circle and invite students to share their initial thoughts, questions, or perceptions of the borderlands, encouraging an open and respectful dialogue. Instructors can create a list of the main themes and questions that emerge from the conversation, which can later be used as a reference to analyze *Lost Children Archive*. These are some questions that can help to guide the discussion:

• What comes to mind when you hear the term “borderlands”?

• The differences between borders and borderlands go beyond physical geography. While traditional borders are often marked by more rigid lines of separation and control, borderlands are characterized by greater complexity, hybridity, and interaction between
neighboring regions. How do you think borderlands differ from traditional borders? What does the nature of each concept encompass?

- What aspects of the borderlands do you believe may impact individuals and communities living in this region?
- How does the portrayal of the borderlands in media and popular culture affect public perception and understanding of the region?

CROSSING BORDERS

Many visual artists, musicians, and filmmakers have explored the themes of borders and borderlands in their work, reflecting their complex and multifaceted nature. Here are a few notable examples followed by some suggested activities, which provide a nuanced and multifaceted exploration of the topics these creators explore.

Ana Teresa Fernández


Ana Teresa Fernández, a Mexican artist who lives in California, has dismantled borders in her work for years, from the physical and psychological boundaries between nations to segregation based on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender. Her 2011 performance Erasing the Border/Borrando la frontera visually “erased” the train rails that divide San Diego and Tijuana by painting the fence with a pastel blue color that creates an optical illusion.
Guillermo Gómez-Peña

The Mexican American Guillermo Gómez-Peña defines himself as a: “Performance artist, writer, radical pedagogue, Public Citizen & activist against all borders” (Guillermo Gómez-Peña Website). He and his troupe of unconventional artists, La Pocha Nostra, tackle topics including American immigration policies, sensuality and violence, and the underlying apprehensions and desires embedded within racial and cultural stereotypes.

Through his dynamic and immersive performances and interventions, Gómez-Peña is known for assuming various roles, such as an alien or a drag-clad terrorist. He also encourages spectator interaction and prompts audience members to act out their own ethnic fantasies. In Living Museum of Fetishized Identities, he even spurred audiences to aim an AK-47. Gómez-Peña serves as a poignant counterpoint to authoritarian and xenophobic politics, and his artistic exploration delves into the psychological depths of both the fear of immigrants and the quest for sexual and political dominion.
**Border Cantos: Richard Misrach and Guillermo Galindo**

Richard Misrach and Guillermo Galindo’s *Border Cantos* (2014–) is a multidimensional collaboration that examines the border between Mexico and the US through music, plastic arts, and photography. The project brings together Misrach’s photography with the Galindo’s signature music and performance work.

Left: Galindo and Misrach, *Border Cantos*, installation at Pace Gallery, August 2017 (Art Observed).


Misrach and Galindo create pieces that both report on and transform the artifacts of migration: water bottles, clothing, backpacks, Border Patrol “drag tires,” spent shotgun shells, ladders, and sections of the Border Wall itself, which Galindo then fashions into instruments to be performed as unique sound-generating devices (clips of these performances can be viewed here). Galindo also creates graphic musical scores, many of which use Misrach’s photographs as points of departure. Together, both artists create a powerful and evocative narrative that goes beyond traditional borders and captures the essence of the US-Mexico borderlands as a place of convergence and divergence, where cultures, histories, and aspirations intersect. The project serves as a testament to the human stories that unfold within and around the area, shedding light
on the challenges, aspirations, and shared humanity of those who inhabit this dynamic and contested space.

**Los Tigres del Norte**

Los Tigres del Norte is a popular Norteño band from Mexico that has produced songs that explore the lives and struggles of migrants. Their music often speaks to the experiences of those living on both sides of the US-Mexico border. They have over more than 70 albums, including 22 No. 1 albums. Access a playlist with some of their most popular tracks [here](#).

**Lila Downs**

Ana Lila Downs, a Mexican American singer, often incorporates migration, borders, and cultural identity themes in her music. She performs her own compositions and the works of others in multiple genres, as well as tapping into Mexican traditional and popular music. Additionally, she skillfully weaves in Indigenous Mexican influences, having recorded songs in numerous native languages, including Mixtec, Zapotec, Mayan, Nahuatl, and Purépecha. Hailing from Oaxaca, she underwent her primary artistic training at the Institute of Arts in Oaxaca and briefly enrolled at the University of Minnesota before redirecting her attention toward her musical vocation. Access a playlist with some of her most popular songs [here](#).

**The Infiltrators**: Cristina Ibarra and Alex Rivera (Directors)

*Cristina Ibarra & Alex Rivera*, Scene from *Infiltrators* with Beni in processing, 2019.

*The Infiltrators* (2019) is a hybrid documentary-thriller that chronicles the events of young undocumented immigrants deliberately getting apprehended by Border Patrol. They then strategically position themselves within a covert, profit-driven detention facility. The central figures of the film are affiliated with the National Immigrant Youth Alliance, a collective of passionate Dreamers—undocumented immigrants who came to the United States as children—determined to halt deportations. Their strategy hinges on challenging detentions from the inside since they believe detention centers serve as optimal sites for preventing deportations.
Intertwining authentic documentary footage of the actual infiltrators with dramatized reenactments of the events within the detention center, the film presents this astonishing narrative through an innovative cinematic approach that transcends traditional boundaries.

**Las Patronas’ Kitchen: Javier García (Director)**


*Las Patronas’ Kitchen* (2016) tells the story of a group of volunteer women of La Patrona community, from the town of Guadalupe in the municipality of Amatlán de los Reyes, Veracruz (Mexico). Since 1995, this group has been dedicated to nourishing and aiding migrants traveling northward through the Veracruz region on top of La Bestia train. Their resolute commitment to upholding the rights of migrants has garnered them several esteemed recognitions, including the National Human Rights Award in 2013. Notably, their efforts were acknowledged through a nomination for the Princess of Asturias Award in 2015, following a Change.org campaign that rallied over 50,000 signatures in support.
**Vida**: Tanya Saracho (Creator)

The TV series *Vida* (2018–2020) explores the lives of two very different Mexican American sisters who return to their gentrified childhood neighborhood in Los Angeles, touching on identity and border culture themes.

![Scene from Vida](image)

Scene from *Vida*. [La estrategia del caracol](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt10043208/)

**Gentefied**: Marvin Lemus and Linda Yvette Chávez (Creators)

The TV series *Gentefied* (2020–2021) focuses on the experiences of the Mexican American Morales cousins while they scramble to save their grandfather’s taco shop as gentrification shakes up their Los Angeles neighborhood. Besides gentrification issues, the

![Gentefied Poster](image)

*Gentefied* Poster. [Imdb](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13386662/)
family in Boyle Heights tackles physical and socioeconomic borders, identity, US citizenship, and family separation.

**Mo**: Mohammed Amer and Ramy Youssef (Creators)

The TV show *Mo* (2022–) explores the story of Mo, a Palestinian refugee living in a US border town in Texas, and his struggles in navigating the US immigration system as an asylum seeker. The series examines facets of the American journey, encompassing gun violence, a fragmented healthcare system, and an immigration framework that compels individuals to navigate (il)legal boundaries.

**Suggested In-Class Activities:**

- Divide students into small groups and assign each group a specific artwork from the list. Have them analyze the visual or sound elements, symbolism, and themes depicted by artists. Ask each group to present their analysis to the class, discussing how the artwork conveys concepts related to borders and borderlands.
- Divide the class into pairs and assign each of them two different creators (for example, Ana Teresa Fernández and Los Tigres del Norte). Have them compare how each artist explores borders and borderlands in their respective works. Encourage students to discuss similarities, differences, and the unique perspectives offered by each.
• Ask students to create their own artistic or written response to the themes of borders and borderlands. This could include writing a short story, composing a song, creating visual artwork, or even designing a film poster.

• Choose a film or TV series from the list and have students watch a relevant episode or segment. Then, engage in a discussion analyzing how the show or film portrays border issues, its impact on raising awareness, and the perspectives it offers.

• Focus on the musicians mentioned here (or others you may find) and their incorporation of migration and identity in their music. Discuss how music can be a powerful medium for conveying emotions and stories related to border experiences. Finally, ask students to listen to select songs and analyze the lyrics’ messages, paying attention to how they engage with the borderlands.

• Have students research and present to the class other artists that resonate with them and work on the topic of the US-Mexico border and borderlands.

• Assign a 400-500 words reflective essay where students choose a work from the list that resonated with them and discuss how it impacted their understanding of borders, borderlands, and related themes. Encourage them to relate it to their own experiences and observations.

BETWEEN BORDERS

In *Lost Children Archive*, the complexities of borders and the borderlands take center stage, weaving a tapestry of historical, cultural, and geopolitical connections. As the characters’ journey evolves and the narrative unfolds, the novel dives into a web of historical and contemporary events that mark the sociopolitical relationship between the US and Mexico. By doing so, Valeria Luiselli’s work evokes questions about the significance of borders, their origins, and their effects on both individuals and their communities.

Borders delineate the separation between two political entities or states. However, the concept of the border transcends a mere political and territorial definition and embodies a symbolic notion. It signifies the division between an “I” and “other” within a space of differentiation, confrontation, and connection. The border acts, therefore, as a marker that shapes individual and collective identities, often reinforcing a sense of belonging within a specific group.
while simultaneously emphasizing the differences. It carries a symbolic weight that represents the multiplicity of identities and the interactions that take place within its divide. It is a physical and ideological space where differentiation, confrontation, and connection coexist, shaping political boundaries and the perceptions and interactions on both sides.

On the Mexican-American borderline, this intercultural space can be seen as a contact zone—a social space where cultures intersect, collide, and engage, often within contexts of unequal power dynamics (Pratt 34, “Art of the Contact Zone”). People from different cultural backgrounds may encounter one another, exchange ideas, practices, and experiences, finding common ground, points of similarity, or shared interests. Cultures colliding in the contact zone refers to situations where differences, conflicts, or tensions arise due to cultural group interactions that may have differing beliefs, values, practices, or social norms. This highlights their cultural differences, which can lead to misunderstandings, disagreements, or even clashes. Collisions may stem from unequal power dynamics, where one culture asserts dominance over the other, potentially leading to a struggle for recognition, representation, or authority. Likewise, cultural engagement implies active and sustained interaction between cultures, where there is a willingness to learn from each other, adapt, negotiate, and find common ground. Engaging cultures may seek to bridge gaps, resolve conflicts, and address power imbalances as a form of interaction that can lead to meaningful exchanges and transformative dialogues within the co-creation of new practices incorporating elements from both cultures.

In other words, the border as a contact zone is a dynamic and complex interface where individuals, separated by geography, history, and ideology, establish asymmetrical power relationships, which leads to not only coercion, inequality, and, frequently, conflict, but also understanding and cooperation. The result is a complex and evolving interaction between cultures and societies, whose dynamics can influence how they interact and navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by their encounter. As such, the border is both something naturally and artificially created by humans. It represents a continuum of interactions and cultural exchanges that catalyze confrontations and ultimately spark transformative shifts that can take multiple forms, through language, artistic fusion, social relationships, cultural approaches, culinary traditions, or a reevaluation of individual and collective identities.

For Mexico and the United States, notions of the border, borderlands, and la frontera encapsulate these complicated, multifaceted, and enduring geopolitical and sociocultural
connections between the two nations (Arrizón, “Border and la frontera”). The border is the international dividing line separating the two countries, while the borderlands include the zones neighboring both sides. They form spaces where transnational encounters occur daily, giving rise to collective realms of transculturation. In *Borderlands/La Frontera* Gloria Anzaldúa portrays this space as a historical, spiritual, cultural, and emotional edge that prompts a journey of discovering one’s identity. According to the Chicana writer, borderlands is an open wound, “*una herida abierta* where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldúa 3, *Borderlands/La Frontera*). In contrast, the idea of *la frontera* (“border” in Spanish) offers an alternative narrative to the concept of *frontier*, which has become synonymous with American expansionism since it was proclaimed by Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893, who argued the presence of vastly unsettled land throughout a significant portion of American history played a pivotal role in shaping national development. However, the symbolic term “*la frontera*” nods to a more comprehensive knowledge production, emphasizing cultural encounters and connections, spanning from the implications of land annexation to the intricate geopolitical and cultural processes of the US-Mexico borderlands.

**Suggested Questions for Discussion:**

- How does *Lost Children Archive* explore the complexities of borders, the borderlands, and *la frontera*? Are there any specific moments that stress the importance of these themes within the story?
- The novel touches on historical events and geopolitical connections between the US and Mexico. In your opinion, do these historical factors influence the characters’ experiences in the borderlands in the present-day? If so, how? For example, they may be shaped by their own family histories of migration; the history of colonization, conquest, and resistance may inform their understanding of the land they traverse; some characters may draw strength from narratives of resilience they hear or read; they may navigate a dual sense of belonging, and their experiences may be infused with elements of both Mexican and American culture, etc.
- Discuss the concepts of borders, identity, and resilience in the novel, reflecting on how they contribute to the overall message of *Lost Children Archive*. 
Suggested In-Class Activity: Reimagine the *frontier*: This activity aims to critically analyze and challenge the concept of the frontier as proclaimed by Frederick Jackson Turner while promoting a deeper understanding of the interconnected nature of American history and identity.

- Instructors should start by providing a brief overview of Frederick Jackson Turner’s thesis on the *frontier* and its historical relevance or circulate copies with excerpts or summaries of Turner’s text “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893) among students (the article in this link can be a useful resource). Key points to keep in mind during the explanation are:
  - Turner’s focus on how the availability of unsettled land throughout American history was critical in determining national development.
  - The idea of the *frontier* as a symbol of freedom, opportunity, and progress within American expansionism.

- In small groups or as a class, ask students:
  - Think of possible criticisms of, or problems with, Turner’s thesis.
  - Reflect on how Turner’s concept of the *frontier* shaped the perception of American history.
  - Discuss in which way Turner’s ideas might have influenced American expansionism and policies towards Indigenous communities and other minorities.

These are four (4) suggested excerpts from Turner’s text that can be useful for this activity:

1. Behind institutions, behind constitutional forms and modifications, lie the vital forces that call these organs into life and shape them to meet changing conditions. The peculiarity of American institutions is, the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people—to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life. Said Calhoun in 1817, “We are great, and rapidly—I was about to say fearfully—growing!” So saying, he touched the distinguishing feature of American life. All
peoples show development; the germ theory of politics has been sufficiently emphasized. In the case of most nations, however, the development has occurred in a limited area; and if the nation has expanded, it has met other growing peoples whom it has conquered. But in the case of the United States we have a different phenomenon. Limiting our attention to the Atlantic coast, we have the familiar phenomenon of the evolution of institutions in a limited area, such as the rise of representative government; the differentiation of simple colonial governments into complex organs; the progress from primitive industrial society, without division of labor, up to manufacturing civilization. But we have in addition to this a recurrence of the process of evolution in each western area reached in the process of expansion. Thus American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial renewal, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the great West. Even the slavery struggle, which is made so exclusive an object of attention by writers like Prof. von Holst, occupies its important place in American history because of its relation to westward expansion. (Turner, “TSFAH”)

2. At the Atlantic frontier one can study the germs of processes repeated at each successive frontier. We have the complex European life sharply precipitated by the wilderness into the simplicity of primitive conditions. The first frontier had to meet its Indian question, its
question of the disposition of the public domain, of the means of intercourse with older settlements, of the extension of political organization, of religious and educational activity. And the settlement of these and similar questions for one frontier served as a guide for the next. The American student needs not to go to the “prim little townships of Sleswick” for illustrations of the law of continuity and development. For example, he may study the origin of our land policies in the colonial land policy; he may see how the system grew by adapting the statutes to the customs of the successive frontiers. He may see how the mining experience in the lead regions of Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa was applied to the mining laws of the Rockies, and how our Indian policy has been a series of experimentations on successive frontiers. Each tier of new States has found in the older ones material for its constitutions. Each frontier has made similar contributions to American character, as will be discussed farther on. (Turner, “TSFAH”)

3. The effect of the Indian frontier as a consolidating agent in our history is important. From the close of the seventeenth century various intercolonial congresses have been called to treat with Indians and establish common measures of defense. Particularism was strongest in colonies with no Indian frontier. This frontier stretched along the western border like a cord of union. The Indian was a common danger, demanding united action. Most celebrated of these conferences was the Albany congress of 1754, called to treat with the Six Nations, and to consider plans of union. Even a cursory reading of the plan proposed by the congress reveals the importance of the frontier. The powers of the general council and the officers were, chiefly, the determination of peace and war with the Indians, the regulation of Indian trade, the purchase of Indian lands, and the
creation and government of new settlements as a security against the Indians. It is evident that the unifying tendencies of the Revolutionary period were facilitated by the previous cooperation in the regulation of the frontier. In this connection may be mentioned the importance of the frontier, from that day to this, as a military training school, keeping alive the power of resistance to aggression, and developing the stalwart and rugged qualities of the frontiersman. (Turner, “TSFAH”)

4. But the most important effect of the frontier has been in the promotion of democracy here and in Europe. As has been indicated, the frontier is productive of individualism. Complex society is precipitated by the wilderness into a kind of primitive organization based on the family. The tendency is anti-social. It produces antipathy to control, and particularly to any direct control. The tax-gatherer is viewed as a representative of oppression. Prof. Osgood, in an able article, has pointed out that the frontier conditions prevalent in the colonies are important factors in the explanation of the American Revolution, where individual liberty was sometimes confused with absence of all effective government. The same conditions aid in explaining the difficulty of instituting a strong government in the period of the confederacy. The frontier individualism has from the beginning promoted democracy. (Turner, “TSFAH”)

- After the analysis of the text, in small groups, encourage students to brainstorm and reimagine a more inclusive frontier in one of the following ways:
  - Prompt them to explore alternative narratives and themes that focus on cooperation and cultural experiences, focusing on how different experiences and perspectives may have shaped the development of the US.
• Ask them to ponder how an inclusive idea of the frontier might be applicable or pertinent to contemporary issues, such as climate change, globalization, technological innovations, etc.

• Have students share their reimagined concept of the frontier with the class in a creative format of their choosing: a sketch, a poster, a poem, a song, a visual art piece, a short story, etc.

• After all the groups present their ideas, have a class discussion where the different versions are compared, pointing out similarities and differences.

SHAPING THE BORDER

During the 1840s, westward expansion in the US was fueled by the discovery of gold in California and the concept of Manifest Destiny—the idea that God ordained the right of the United States to expand its dominion across the North American continent. This view of imperialism as a divine will, directly influenced the US’ disregard of Mexican sovereignty and led to the Mexican American War (1846–1848) after US troops unilaterally annexed Mexican land rich in natural resources.

Map of United States at the Beginning of the Mexican War (1846). Library of Congress.
The signing of the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty in 1848 ended the war between the two neighboring countries. This pact, along with the Gadsden Purchase—an agreement between the United States and Mexico, finalized in 1854, in which the US paid Mexico $10 million for a 29,670 square mile of what later became part of Arizona and New Mexico—solidified the US southern border we know today. Nevertheless, these contracts had devastating consequences not only in terms of the Mexican loss of territory, but also for the ancestral tribal communities living in the zone, including the different Apache groups and the Tohono O’odham, a Native American nation located in the Sonoran Desert on the US-Mexico border in Arizona. The physical imposition of this new border divided families and communities, hindering their ancient practices and movements across the territory. Additionally, unlike Indigenous peoples along the US-Canada border, full US citizenship for Native Americans residing in ceded territories was not granted until the 1930s.

Still, Mexicans who chose to remain in the US after the Mexican-American war were forced to assimilate to a new culture and were subjected to the dominance and control of the Anglo-expansionists. The latter, enticed by notions of adventure and capitalism, saw themselves as divinely chosen people. This perception was shaped by a combination of ideological, religious, moral, economic, cultural, and racial factors that not only justified their endeavors but also rationalized their imposition of dominance and control over other groups in the newly acquired territories. They believed in a divine mission bestowed by God, which entailed establishing a distinct society, divergent from the old world, and constructing a political framework grounded in democratic institutions, a facet often overlooked by European nations. This sentiment was echoed by newspapers and in political discourses of the time, especially during war. For example, New York Herald said in 1847: “The universal Yankee nation can regenerate and disenthrall the people of Mexico in a few years; and we believe it is part of our destiny to civilize that beautiful country” (Mandigan Ruiz, Sanders, and Sommers 140, “Mexico’s Lost Land”). Congressman William F. Giles stated in a Congressional Globe editorial February 11, 1847: “I take it for granted, that we shall gain territory, and must gain territory. . . .We must march from ocean to ocean. . . .We must march from Texas straight to the Pacific ocean, and be bounded only by its roaring wave. . . .It is the destiny of the white race, it is the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon race” (Dodge 23, Which Chosen People?).
Once the conflict between Mexico and the US was over, previous ideals didn’t disappear. As the Mexican population in the Southwest grew, explicit discrimination increased. While during 19th century most Mexicans in the US became US citizens, they were nevertheless perceived as “the other,” a non-white and inferior class that could challenge white supremacy. The belief in racial purity and superiority, which was closely aligned to the notion that each race possessed distinct qualities ordained by a divine force, perpetuated an enduring and rigid division between marginalized Mexicans and the white settlers in the newly established nation. Consequently, mob violence, discriminatory policies, and laws against Spanish-speaking people were common in the country during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Through narrative elements, *Lost Children Archive* highlights past and present legacies that continue to shape the borderlands and the lives of its inhabitants to this day. It is not by accident that the story’s central plot revolves around a cross-country road trip moving west from NY to Arizona. This travel symbolically echoes the westward migration of settlers and the removal of Indigenous communities during the 19th-century. At the beginning of the novel, the family is called a tribe (p. 7) and yet the closer they get to the border the less united they become.

Luiselli’s literary work offers a provoking and layered portrayal of US imperialism and the long history of injustices to borderland communities. One of the novel’s central themes is the Chiricahua Apache’s land dispossession, which speaks directly to US westward expansion. When the father tells stories to the children explaining how Indians were driven out of their land, he identifies the “bad guys” as “Republican cowboys and cowgirls,” stressing the past and present role the US government policies have when it comes to forced displacement (Luiselli 80, *LCA*). Meanwhile, the mother alludes to the most recent US intervention in Latin American wars and pins the root of the refugee problem on them (p. 51). The woman also acknowledges her and her husband’s effort to avoid telling anyone that she was born in Mexico after an encounter with Border Patrol officers that asked for her passport (p. 130). To avoid repeating this situation, she starts telling strangers white lies about her identity, who she is, who the kids are, and what she and her husband do for work. She embodies different personas as a means for survival.
**Suggested Questions for Discussion:**

- What were the consequences of the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty and the Gadsden Purchase for both Mexico and the Indigenous tribal communities in the affected zones?
- In what ways did Mexicans who chose to remain in the US after the Mexican-American War face challenges in terms of cultural assimilation and the dominance of Anglo-expansionists?
- How can acknowledging and learning the history of westward expansion contribute to addressing contemporary issues related to immigration, diversity, and social justice?
- How does *Lost Children Archive* emphasize the ongoing legacy of US imperialism and injustices in the borderlands? Can you find concrete instances or examples that stress the US government’s role regarding forced displacement?
- How does the novel challenge prevailing beliefs about race, ethnicity, and identity? Do the characters’ experiences illustrate the enduring impact of racial hierarchies and identity construction in the US-Mexico borderlands and beyond?
- How does *Lost Children Archive* prompt discussions about contemporary issues related to borders, migration, and cultural encounters? Does this portrayal of the borderlands resonate with current sociopolitical dynamics?

**Suggested In-Class Activities:**

- Challenge students to write newspaper articles reporting historical events from the westward expansion era. They can write as journalists of that time, providing different perspectives on significant events at the US-Mexico border, such as the Gold Rush, the signing of the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty, the Gadsden Purchase, or the Apache Chiricahuas removal.
- The phrase “Manifest Destiny” first appeared in an editorial published in the July–August 1845 issue of *The Democratic Review* and it is attributed to its editor John L. O’Sullivan. The article, which advocated for Texas incorporation, expressed the enduring American conviction of the divinely assigned duty of the United States to guide the global shift towards democratic governance, which later motivated wars and expansionism over the
course of the 19th century. This resulted not only in the conflict with Mexico, but also in the dislocation and brutal wrongdoing of Indigenous peoples, Hispanic, and other non-European groups that were in the territories now occupied by the US.

**Suggested In-Class Activity:**

- Circulate copies among students of the following map that portrays the territorial expansion of the United States.

![Territorial Expansion Map](image)

The territorial expansion of the United States. [National Geographic](https://www.nationalgeographic.com).

- Divide students into small groups or assign each group a specific territorial acquisition to work on these steps:
  - Create a timeline of key events and acquisitions based on the map, identifying important dates, territories gained, and significant events that contributed to the expansion.
  - Research and discuss the impact of each acquisition on Indigenous populations, existing settlements, and geopolitical relations.
Reflect on how these acquisitions shaped the concept of Manifest Destiny and contributed to the expansion of the United States.

The following activity was adapted from Teaching There There in Wisconsin (2023), written by Addie Hopes (pgs. 24-25): In a 2015 study of K-12 US History standards from all fifty states built on previous research, researchers set out to find answers to the following:

- What is the frequency of Indigenous content (histories, cultures, current issues) covered in state-level U.S. history standards for K–12?
- What is the difference between the frequency of inclusion of pre-1900 Indigenous content and post-1900 Indigenous content in the U.S. history standards for K–12?
- How do the standards depict Indigenous Peoples in U.S. history?

Their findings reinforce previous research on how US textbooks present Indigenous peoples through negative stereotypes and minimize Indigenous peoples’ cultures and histories in favor of preserving a Eurocentric narrative. Their findings also show that in the state standards across the US, “Indigenous peoples were largely confined within a pre-1900 context” and were “devoid of any significant voice.” In short, the standards 1.) tend to reinforce the mythology of Manifest Destiny and the stereotype of the “disappearing Native” by treating Native American peoples as relics of the past and 2.) do not incorporate Native and Indigenous voices telling their stories in their own terms.

- Encourage the class to reflect on what they’ve learned in school about Native histories and US westward expansionism thus far.
- Ask students to share what they know about Indigenous Peoples Day in Wisconsin and (if possible) where they learned about it.
- Read or listen to the WUWM news radio story about the creation of Indigenous Peoples Day in Wisconsin, an initiative that began with a group of Wisconsin students at the Indian Community School who were learning about Christopher Columbus and wanted to challenge this incomplete version of the story of colonization. In pairs or small groups, students discuss how Indigenous Peoples Day challenges the master narrative usually taught in schools. Then, invite students to brainstorm a respectful way that their school might commemorate
Indigenous Peoples Day and the ongoing contributions of Native American and Indigenous peoples in the US.

Close-Reading Exercise:

The following fragment of Lost Children Archive appears under the subheading “Westerns.” Circulate copies to students and ask them to read it, individually or in groups, paying attention to its form and content. While they are reading, have students circling keywords and underlining the main ideas of the text.

People start asking us where we’re from, what we do for a living, and what we’re doing all the way “out here.”
We drove here from New York, I say.
We do radio, my husband says.
We are documentarists, I sometimes say.
Documentarians, he corrects me.
We’re working on a sound documentary, I tell them.
A documentary about nature, he follows.
Yes! I add. About the plants and animals of these lands.
But the farther out we drive, the less these little truths and lies about us seem to appease people’s need for an explanation. When my husband tells an inquisitive stranger in a dinner that he was also born in the south, he gets a cold nod and raised eyebrows in return. Then, in a gas station outside a town called Loco, I get asked about my accent and place of birth, and I say no, I was not born in this country, and when I say where I was born, I don’t even get a nod in return. Just cold, dead silence, as if I’ve confessed a sin. (Luiselli 129, LCA)

After reading the quote, instructors can ask students the following questions:

- Reflect on the significance of “little truths and lies” used by the narrator to describe their responses to people’s questions. How does it reflect (or not reflect) the characters’
experiences as they journey through the borderlands? What does it say about the social dynamics and perceptions in this region?

- Why do you think the characters don’t want to tell the truth about what they are doing during their road trip?
- How does the text depict the idea of “otherness”? Is this identity distinction self-imposed or forced by others in the journey?
- In the context of the story, what do you think the narrator implies when she expresses that being born outside the country feels like a sin?
- Compare the treatment the characters receive based on their nationality. How does this comparison connect or illustrate the racial hierarchy and the construction of identity that took place during the US westward expansion?
- Does the town name “Loco” add a layer of significance to the text? What associations does this name suggest?
- Consider the placement of this fragment within the subheading “Westerns.” Do you find the text is relevant when viewed in the context of the US western expansion? How does this quote represent the challenges that the protagonists face as they travel through the southwestern regions?

UNIT ACTIVITIES AND PROJECT IDEAS

- Dioramas: Have students create three-dimensional dioramas that represent scenes from the *Lost Children Archive* or themes related to the family road trip along the US-Mexico borderlands. Encourage them to use props, figurines, and other craft materials to portray relevant moments of the story and depict challenges the characters face during their journey.
- Comic Strips: Divide students into small groups or allow them to work individually and ask them to choose three to five relevant scenes from *Lost Children Archive* regarding the US-Mexico border and its cultural, political, or socio-economic history. These could include passages that approach migration, historical events, identity, cultural exchanges, etc. After giving the class some time to reflect on these scenes and their relation to the US-Mexico borderlands background, ask students to plan a comic strip layout that
illustrates their selection and connects the novel with the US-Mexico border. They can decide the number of panels and the order of the events and include captions or speech bubbles to convey information and dialogues.

- A variation of this activity would be creating six boxed storytelling illustrations, like what the girl does in *Lost Children Archive* (pgs. 62-63). Each box should represent a specific event and use symbolism (no dialogues, captions, or speech bubbles) to convey their ideas. After completing the boxes, students can add other elements—symbols, landscapes, cultural representations, historical figures, etc.—that deepen the connection between the novel and the border narratives.

- Travel Brochures: Divide students into small groups and assign each of them a different region or city that appears in *Lost Children Archive* during the family road trip along the border. Each group should create a travel brochure that invites tourists to visit the place, highlighting its landmarks and main attractions while providing insights into the region’s history and cultural diversity.

- Primary Source Analysis: Ask students to choose a variety of primary sources that reflect different perspectives on Manifest Destiny. These could be excerpts from editorials, speeches, letters, and writings from political leaders, journalists, settlers, Indigenous Peoples, foreign diplomats, etc. Have them research sources representing a range of viewpoints, including those in favor of Manifest Destiny and those critical of it. To help them with their analysis, instructors can provide a worksheet that includes sections for identifying the author, date, context, main arguments, the language used, and any justifications given for or against Manifest Destiny. After they have read and analyzed the sources, encourage students to discuss their findings within their groups and identify key themes or patterns that highlight the main arguments and perspectives presented. Then, lead a class discussion that focuses on the following points:
  - What common arguments and justifications were presented in favor of Manifest Destiny across the sources?
  - How did the language used in each source reflect the beliefs and values of the time?
o Did you find any differences in how people viewed Manifest Destiny during the 19th century?

o How do these different perspectives influence contemporary discussions about American identity, expansionism, and imperialism?

o What were some of the implications of Manifest Destiny on Indigenous Peoples, Mexicans, and other non-European groups?

As a follow-up or alternative activity, students can individually write a response paper that synthesizes their understanding of Manifest Destiny, reflecting on its impact and drawing connections to present-day discussions and issues in the US.

These are some ideas for websites where students can find primary sources:

   a)  Library of Congress
   b)  American Antiquarian Society
   c)  Docs Teach
   d)  Digital History
UNIT 5. ON SOUND (MINI UNIT)

ABOUT THIS UNIT

Sound becomes a character that plays a crucial role in Lost Children Archive by enhancing the narrative and underscoring its main themes. In the novel, the acoustic elements go beyond noise in the background. They serve as a powerful storytelling tool that conveys emotions as well as the complex historical and socio-political framework that the story portrays. Moreover, the descriptions of sound elevate the reader’s understanding of the characters’ experiences, adding depth and a layer of authenticity.

This unit on sound in the novel aims to provide instructional support without extensive historical, cultural, and political context. However, this mini unit will work best if students are familiar with previously covered topics. Therefore, it is recommended that instructors wait to conduct these activities until students have read the majority, if not all, of the novel.

The first subsection, “Sound Archives,” examines the concept of soundscapes. As the husband and wife create their own sound documentary through their journey, we analyze meticulously recorded ambient sounds, conversations, and fleeting moments to construct a sonic tapestry. The second subsection, “Sounds in the Car,” focuses on how during their cross-country road trip, the character’s interaction with the radio, audiobooks, and specific musical pieces they listen to in the car becomes a form of self-expression and cultural exploration. The third subsection, “Sounds on Repeat,” explores how the echoes and word repetitions in the story become a verbal reenactment that connects past and present realities.

RECOMMENDED SOURCES & AND READINGS

- Acoustic Ecology Lab at ASU.
OPEN ACTIVITY
What did you hear?

This activity aims to help students recognize the significance of sound in their daily lives and establish an introductory connection with the concept of soundscapes. The exercise can be completed inside a classroom or outdoors.

Begin by asking students to close their eyes and listen carefully to the sounds around them for one or two minutes. After the time is up, have students share the sounds they heard and lead a class discussion, emphasizing how sounds (even background noise) are an essential part of our environment and daily experiences. Ask students if any sounds they heard evoke specific emotions or memories and how they think sounds can influence our perception of a particular place or situation. These are some questions that may help guide your discussion:

- Can you describe what you heard?
- How did the sounds you heard during the activity make you feel? Did anything remind you of something specific or make you feel a specific way?
- Why do you think certain sounds impact our emotions more than others?

Can you think of any examples where sound has played an important role in conveying a message or setting a concrete atmosphere? For example, in movies or TV shows, a lack
of sound or the strategic use of eerie, minimalistic music can heighten tension and create a sense of anticipation before a climactic moment. In a library, the hushed and quiet environment is intentionally maintained to create an atmosphere of focus, concentration, and respect for others. Museums often strategically use sound or the lack thereof to enhance visitors’ experiences or to complement the theme of an exhibition. And when visiting a nature reserve or park, the absence of man-made sounds, such as traffic or machinery, emphasizes the natural beauty of the environment and allows visitors to connect with nature.

**Imagine sounds**

This activity aims to introduce students to the idea of creating mental images through sounds, which enhances our understanding, emotional engagement, and overall experience of the world around us.

Have students close their eyes and ask them to listen attentively to the sound they will hear, focusing on the mental images it arouses. Then, play a short audio clip or sound recording of your choice that represents a specific environment or scene. For example, you might play audio of a busy city street, a serene forest, a stormy sea, a traffic jam, etc. After playing the sound clip, ask students to describe the mental images they formed while listening and have a discussion centered around a) the significance of soundscapes in storytelling and b) how sounds can evoke vivid mental imagery.

Here are some questions that may help guide your discussion:

- What images came to mind while listening?
- Why do you think certain sounds can create vivid mental images?
- How do you think sounds contribute to readers’ experience of reading *Lost Children Archive*?
SOUND ARCHIVES

In *Lost Children Archive* the husband and the wife embrace their roles as documentarian and documentarist across the country. He is recording the acoustic traces of the last free Chiricahua Apaches while she is documenting the whereabouts of “lost children”—kids who ventured alone on a trip to reach the US but never made it, either because they were deported, or did not survive the journey. “Through the pursuit of sounds that appear only in the elusive forms of echoes and reverberations, both projects turn the novel into an archive of what is missing, has been disregarded, or cannot be apprehended” (Vázquez Enríquez, “The Sounds of the Desert,” 75). The projects focus on sounds that are not immediately evident but exist, transforming the novel into a sound archive that preserves what is absent, overlooked, or beyond direct comprehension.

Soundscapes are at the core of the novel. The term “soundscape” was coined by Michael Southworth in 1969 in his article “The Sonic Environment of Cities,” where he analyzed the urban design of cities based on noise and sounds. However, the concept was popularized by musicologist R. Murray Schafer in the late 1970s and early 1980s thanks to his World Soundscape Project study. For Schafer, soundscapes are defined as a series of events that are recognized and accepted by a society as part of their identity (Schafer, *The Tuning of the World*, 10).

Furthermore, the reader is introduced to the soundscape of the story not only through the parents’ jobs but also through the road trip itself. During *Lost Children Archive* the fast-paced narrative mimics the feeling created when one sees a blurred landscape through the side window of a swiftly moving car. As readers, we get to know the family through their conversations, the noises they make, and the music they play. In other words, we get to share the family’s moments and memories during their journey as they happen. In fact, it is not a coincidence that the first part of the novel is called “Family Soundscape.”

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

- What is the significance of soundscapes in *Lost Children Archive*? How does the concept of soundscapes contribute to the novel’s exploration of identity and societal recognition?
• In what ways do the novel capture the family’s moments and memories during their road trip? How do you think the “Family Soundscape” concept plays a role in the novel?
• Reflect on the idea that soundscapes can preserve what is missing or overlooked in a society. Does this idea connect to the broader themes and messages of *Lost Children Archive* in any form?

**Suggested In-Class Activity:**

• Have students working individually or in small groups and provide them with specific locations or settings: the school cafeteria, the library, a park, a busy street, etc. Ask them to use their imagination to create a soundscape for that specific location. Students can use their voices, objects in the classroom, or any digital sound effects to mimic the sounds they would hear in that setting. Afterward, have the class share their soundscapes and discuss the emotions and atmospheres they convey. Relate this activity to the husband and wife’s sound archives when possible. Students can use their phones to make recordings.
  
  o Here are some examples of soundscapes and related resources that students could explore and discuss in relation to this activity: “Weather Report” Album (Chris Watson), Urban Soundscapes of the World, National Park Service’s Sound Gallery, BBC Sound Effects, and Wild Soundscapes.

**SOUNDS IN THE CAR**

In *Lost Children Archive*, the main characters engage in various activities to pass the time, ease tension, and break the silence during their lengthy road trip. They find solace and entertainment in listening to songs (“Paint It Black,” “Highwayman,” “Space Oddity,” etc.) and audiobooks like *The Road* or *The Lord of the Flies*. Through these shared auditory experiences inside of the vehicle, they engage in lively debates about the meanings of lyrics and even instrumental pieces, prompting discussions that mimic their own emotions about the journey, their work, and the dynamics of their relationships with one another.
Suggested Questions for Discussion:

- Reflect on a personal experience when music or a particular song has played a significant role in your life or helped you process emotions. How does this relate to the protagonists of *Lost Children Archive*?
- How does engaging in shared musical and acoustic experiences, such as listening to audiobooks and songs, contribute to the overall mood and atmosphere during a road trip?
- How does music help the characters cope with their challenges and uncertainties in the novel?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

- Assign each student a character from the novel (or let them choose one) and ask them to create a personalized soundtrack for that character. Students should select songs that they think reflect this character’s personality, experiences, and journey in the novel. At the end, they can present their selection to the class, explain their song choices, and discuss how they capture the essence of their character.
- Choose a scene from *Lost Children Archive*; for example, when the family meets the Border Patrol agents, when they visit Geronimo’s tomb, when they witness the unaccompanied minors’ deportations, when the children get lost in the desert, etc. Then, ask students to work individually and select songs that they believe best reflect the emotions and themes present in that moment in the novel. Finally, have a class discussion where they present their song choices and explain their reasoning. Encourage students to analyze each song’s lyrics, melody, and mood and discuss how it connects to the chosen scene in the novel.
Close-Reading Exercise:

Circulate copies of this fragment to students and ask them to read it, individually or in groups, paying attention to its form and content. While reading, encourage them to circle keywords and underline the text’s main ideas.

Later that afternoon, when the rain has finally turned into a mere drizzle, we get back in the car, heading toward Nashville. Every day, we drive forward, though it sometimes feels like we’re on a treadmill. Inside the car, there is a sort of cyclical current of voices, questions, attitudes, and predictable reactions. Between my husband and me, silence is steadily growing. “When we woke in the woods in the dark of the cold of the night . . .” The line comes up again. I pause the recording and look for a music playlist. We each get to pick one song. I choose Odetta’s version of Dylan’s “With God on Our Side,” which I think is so much better than the original. My husband picks “Straight to Hell,” in the original version by The Clash. The boy wants The Rolling Stones, and picks “Paint It Black”—and I acknowledge his good taste in music. The girl wants “Highwayman,” with Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, and two others whom we don’t know and always forget to look up. We play the song a couple of times as we drive, unraveling the lyrics as if we were dealing with Baroque poetry. My theory is that it’s a song about fiction, about being able to live many lives through fiction. My husband thinks it’s a song about American history, and American guilt. The boy thinks it’s a song about technological developments in means of transportation: from horseback riding, to schooners, to spaceship navigation. He may be right. The girl doesn’t have a theory yet but is clearly trying to work it out. (Luiselli 101, LCA)
After reading the text, instructors can ask students the following questions:

- How does the author use the description of the rain turning into a mere drizzle to create a specific atmosphere in the scene? Is there a connection with the recording they are listening to?

- What do you think the mother implies when she says: “Every day, we drive forward, though it sometimes feels like we’re on a treadmill”?

- How does the choice of songs (“With God on Our Side,” “Straight to Hell,” “Paint It Black,” and “Highwayman”) reflect the characters’ personalities and cultural preferences?
  - Note: Teachers are encouraged to play the four songs using the hyperlinks while answering this question.

- What does each character’s interpretation of “Highwayman” tell us about their perspectives on life and the world? What does the narrator mean when she says they are “unraveling the lyrics as if we were dealing with Baroque poetry.”

**SOUNDS ON REPEAT**

The echoes and word repetitions in *Lost Children Archive* become a verbal reenactment that connects past and present realities by reflecting the girl’s experiences and understanding of the world around her. The girl repeats data, phrases, or information that she finds funny or interesting, such as the word saguaro), “Jesus Fucking Christ,” or the fact that Geronimo fell off his horse and died. Likewise, her box (Box VI) is full of written echoes that compile the soundscapes of their journey, including when she and her brother get lost. As a result, she reinforces and validates the importance of these events and terms within the story by doing so. These repetitions are storytelling forms that explore various environments and scenarios while linking different realities across time and space. Hence, the reverberations through the novel are narrative and acoustic tools that allow the exploration of history, memory, nature, and human experience.
Suggested Questions for Discussion:

- Discuss the role of the girl as a storyteller through her comments and mimicry. Does her habit of repeating phrases contribute to the novel’s themes of memory, loss, and the passage of time?
- How do the echoes and word repetitions add depth and authenticity to the novel’s narrative? Think about the ways in which these elevate the reader’s engagement with the story and the characters.
- How does the use of echoes and word repetitions create a sense of rhythm and musicality in the novel?
- In what ways does the girl’s mimicry reflect her understanding of the world around her? How do these verbal reenactments express her perspectives, feelings, and evolving thoughts as the story progresses?

Suggested In-Class Activities:

- Ask the students to imagine themselves in the girl’s shoes during the road trip. Have them create their own soundscapes and echoes by writing a journal entry or a short story that captures the ambient sounds, conversations, and music they would hear during the journey. Encourage them to incorporate word repetitions that reflect the character’s experiences and understanding of the world around them.
- Have the students create their own version of Box VI, inspired by the girl’s echoes collection. Ask them to fill in a box or folder where they compile written records, drawings, or mementos that represent the soundscapes of their daily lives or a specific journey. On a separate piece of paper, ask the students to describe each item and explain their importance, paying special attention to how it describes their experiences and connects to their understanding of the world around them.
UNIT ACTIVITIES AND PROJECT IDEAS

- **Sound Mapping Adventure**: Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a specific area on the school campus or a nearby outdoor location to explore. Instruct them to walk silently through their area and to focus on the sounds they hear. Have students use a recording device (an audio recorder, a camera, or their cellphones) to document the sounds around them. In a notebook, students should write down descriptions of the sounds they hear and how they make them feel. Once they return to class, each group shares their sound observations, explaining the sounds they encounter and their emotional responses.

- **Soundtrack**: Ask students to create a Soundscape Soundtrack for *Lost Children Archive* with elements that, according to them, represent or relate to the themes of the story the best. Have them select songs, instrumental pieces, or ambient sounds that in their opinion capture the essence of the novel. Each student should present and explain their chosen tracks.

- **Sound Narrative**: Divide students into groups and assign each of them a specific topic of the novel, such as “road trip,” “lost children,” “memory,” etc. Ask each group to create an installation representing the theme and the narrative visually and acoustically. For their pieces, students can use recorded sounds, spoken words, music, images, text, paper, markers, and digital tools for their installations. In the end, each group should present and explain their work.

- **Divide the students into groups and assign each of them a specific location or setting mentioned in *Lost Children Archive*, for example, cities or towns, the Arizona desert, the detention center, the school, the church in NY, motels, gas stations, diners, etc. Then, ask each group to create a “Soundscape Collage” using audio recordings they find online or record by themselves. They should combine this sounds with images and a brief description of what these locations inspired them. Finally, have students present their collages and facilitate a class discussion about how soundscapes contribute to the novel’s narrative.
UNIT 6: CLOSE READING (MINI-UNIT)

This guide to close reading is adapted from Teaching Kiss of the Spider Woman in Wisconsin (2019), written by Amanda Ong, which was adapted from a worksheet written by Professor Ramzi Fawaz.

WHAT IS CLOSE READING?

Close reading is a specific method of literary analysis that uses the interpretation of a small piece of text to think about the whole. It is the practice of developing multiple interpretations of a given text, object, or phenomenon based on evidence collected from close observation and critical thinking.

- Close observation (or reading closely) involves slowing down and paying close attention to what we are reading or viewing. We do this to pull out big ideas or key images and identify the details of what is in front of us. When we closely observe something, we are dealing with the “WHAT” aspect of a given object: What am I seeing? What is happening here? What is the context in which this is taking place? When was it written or produced? What is the form in which a story or image is being conveyed?

- Critical thinking deals with the HOW and WHY of a given object: How is this story or this set of ideas being communicated to me? How are these ideas organized into an argument or claim about the world? Why has the author or creator decided to communicate a set of ideas in one specific way instead of another? Why am I seeing or reading about some things while others are marked, ignored, or overlooked? What are the consequences of these omissions? In other words, critical thinking demands that we ask what the purpose of a given text is and how its presentation of stories, ideas, forms, values, or perspectives has different effects on the world.

The steps below are intended to help you persuasively close read a passage in a literary text (though the skills you develop are applicable to the close reading and analysis of any text anywhere):
1) Distinguish between different kinds of sources, mediums, and modes of address:

Before you start reading or viewing something, always identify what kind of source it is, what medium or genre it occupies, and who it might be speaking to. Are you watching a movie, a short film, a digital video, or a website? What year was it written, produced, or performed, and in what context? Who might have read, viewed, or listened to this text, and where did it circulate? These specifics help you better understand the purpose of a text or cultural object as well as the potential intended audience. They may also help you grasp how different texts impart a range of cultural and political values or make distinct arguments about the world using a variety of creative techniques and forms of communication. Not all things are novels, just like not all things are movies, television, or music. The distinctions matter.

2) Identify the argument:

Always identify the central argument or claim the author or text is making. Basically, the big idea of the piece:

- What are we meant to take away from reading or viewing this text?
- What is going on here?
- Who is speaking? What is the speaker/character/narrator saying? In what context?

If you are unable to write a 1-2 sentence summary of the passage, read through it again until you have a clearer idea. Don’t panic if you’re unsure. Many texts are deliberately ambiguous or confusing—it is not always possible to articulate in definite terms what is happening.

3) Follow the organization of ideas:

All arguments, claims, or viewpoints are shaped by how they are articulated or delivered. You can follow the organization of ideas that leads someone to a particular point of view or claim, which might involve simply following the plot structure of a movie or a work of literary fiction, or listening to how lyrics are organized around rhythms and beats in a song. In each of these cases, you have to ask yourself: what is the logic by which this text makes its point? It is not enough to understand an argument; you must also know how it came to be made.
4) Identify how the text uses evidence:

Circle/underline the specific words, images, and literary devices that contribute to your identified mood and tone of the text. These might include any of the following:

- Unusual vocabulary or diction (archaic words, neologisms, foreign imports, slang, colloquialisms). Use a dictionary if you need to look up words you don’t recognize.
- Symbols: does the writer use images that would seem to represent something else?
- Metaphors and similes: figures of speech that compare two things but in different ways. A metaphor directly equates one thing to another, suggesting they share similar qualities or characteristics. A simile compares two things more explicitly, using “like” or “as.”
- Striking comparisons or contrasts: pay attention if the text includes language or imagery to highlight similarities or differences between two or more things, ideas, characters, or situations. These comparisons are often employed to emphasize certain aspects, evoke emotions, or draw attention to significant themes.
- Personification: does the writer attribute human qualities to non-human entities or objects?
- Alliteration and/or onomatopoeia: does the author imitate natural sounds or create a musical rhythmic effect that makes the language more memorable?
- Repetition

5) The bigger picture:

What is at stake? Considering these details, you can start developing an overall interpretation of the passage.

- Think about the ways that your passage fits into the text as a whole.
- What do you think is the text’s main message?
- How does it contribute to the broader themes of the work?
- How do the particular literary devices you have identified help to emphasize, intensify or trouble the questions and issues with which the text is concerned? This is the “SO WHAT?” of the item.
- What does this writer or this cultural object want to say?
• What position is being taken in relation to bigger ideas or conflicts?
• Why are the ideas being presented important?

In order to make your own judgments and form substantive arguments in response to what you read and view, you must be able to say what is at stake in the very sources you are discussing.

Suggested Activities for Close Reading Exercises:

• Ask students to read the passage individually and write down their emotional responses. Then, have a class discussion where students share their feelings and explore how the author’s use of language and narrative evokes those emotions.
• Create a “scavenger hunt” activity where students search for specific literary devices within the text. Before starting, give them a list of devices to look for (e.g., metaphors, personification, alliteration, etc.) and ask them to find examples of them in the passage.
• After reading the passage, assign each student a different character’s perspective and have them rewrite the scene from that character’s point of view. Students must consider how their unique background and experiences might shape their perception of the events.
• At the end of a close reading exercise, ask students to write a short reflection on their interpretation of the passage. What did they discover through the reading process? Did their understanding of the novel change after taking some time to read the passage carefully? Encourage them to support their reflections with evidence from the text.

Sample Close Reading Exercise:
This passage can use be used to apply the techniques discussed above.

But I think in the end, it was impossible for them. Not because they didn’t like each other but because their plans were too different. One was a documentarian and the other a documentarist, and neither one wanted to give up being who they were, and in the end that is a good thing, Ma told me one night, and said someday we will both understand it better.
Remember I told you one day, which seems kind of long ago now though it isn’t, that I wasn’t sure if I was going to be a documentarist or a documentarian, and that I didn’t tell Ma and Pa about it at first because I didn’t want them to think I was trying to copy them or had no ideas of my own but also because I didn’t want to have to choose if I’d be a documentarian or a documentarist? And then I thought maybe I could be both? I kept thinking about that, about how to be both.

I thought this, though it was all a bit confused: maybe, with my camera, I can be a documentarian, and with this recorder where I’ve been recording, which is Mama’s, I can be a documentarist and document everything else my pictures couldn’t. I thought about writing stuff down in a notebook for you to read one day, but you are a bad reader still, level A or B, still read everything backward or in a mess, and have no idea when you’ll finally learn to read properly, or if you ever will. So I decided to record sound instead. Also, writing is slower and reading is slower, but at the same time, listening is slower than looking, which is a contradiction that cannot be explained. Anyway, I decided to record, which was faster, although I don’t mind slow things. People usually like fast things, I don’t know what kind of person you will be in the future, a person who likes slow things or one who likes fast things. I kind of hope you are the type of person who likes slow things, but I can’t rely on that. So I made this recording and took all those pictures. (Luiselli 348-349, LCA)

- What is the main idea of this passage? Who is the narrator, and what is the central conflict or challenge that he presents?
- Who is the narrator referring to when mentioning “one” and “the other”? What are their professions?
- Who is the narrator talking to in the passage?
- Why didn’t the narrator initially share the uncertainty about becoming a documentarist or documentarian with his parents?
• What might the narrator mean when he says being both a documentarian and a documentarist is “a bit confused”? Why do you think he uses the adjective “confused” instead of “confusing”?

• How does the narrator plan to combine being a documentarian and a documentarist?

• According to the text, what are the advantages and disadvantages of recording sound compared to writing? Why does the narrator choose recording sound over writing to document their story?

• Discuss the protagonist’s hopes and uncertainties about the kind of person the child (the “you” mentioned in the passage) will become. How does this reflection on preferences for fast or slow things reveal his character and values? Are there any other moments in the story that exemplify these characteristics?

• Analyze the use of imagery and metaphors in the text. How does Valeria Luiselli’s writing reflect the character’s internal dialogue and sense of uncertainty?

• In what ways does the passage contribute to Lost Children Archive’s exploration of the role of art, sound, storytelling, and expression in preserving experiences and memories?
UNIT 7: PREPARING TO MEET THE WRITER (MINI UNIT)

These guidelines to preparing to meet the writer are adapted from *There There in Wisconsin* (2023), written by Addie Hopes (pgs. 116–118).

OBJECTIVES

- To prepare students to make the most of the Annual Student Conference through active and respectful engagement.
- To provide strategies for building student confidence, addressing concerns, and setting expectations for conference participation.

CONFERENCE KEYNOTE SPEAKER: VALERIA LUISELLI

This year, the Great World Texts program will welcome Valeria Luiselli, author of *Lost Children Archive*, to the Annual Student Conference. Students from across the state will have the opportunity to converse with her about thoughts on concerns that captured them while reading his novel. This interaction is the core component of the Annual Student Conference.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Valeria Luiselli was born in Mexico City and grew up in South Korea, South Africa, and India. An acclaimed writer of both fiction and nonfiction, she is the author of literary works such as *Sidewalks*, *Faces in the Crowd* (2014), *The Story of My Teeth* (2015), *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017), and *Lost Children Archive* (2019).

She is the recipient of a 2019 MacArthur Fellowship and the winner of the DUBLIN Literary Award, two Los Angeles Times Book Prizes, The Carnegie Medal, an American Book Award, and has been nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award, the Kirkus Prize, and the Booker Prize. Luiselli has been a National Book Foundation “5 Under 35” honoree and the recipient of a Bearing Witness Fellowship from the Art for Justice Fund.

Luiselli received a BA (2008) in philosophy from the National Autonomous University of Mexico and a Ph.D. (2015) in comparative literature from Columbia University. She was an assistant professor in the Romance Languages and Literatures Department at Hofstra University.
(2015–2018) and taught in City College of New York’s Beyond Identity Program (2017) prior to joining Bard College’s Program in Written Arts as a writer in residence in the fall of 201 and is a visiting professor at Harvard University. Her work has appeared in publications like *El País*, *Letras Libres*, *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *Granta*, and *McSweeney’s*, among others, and has been translated into over twenty languages.

**ON MEETING THE WRITER**

Meeting the writer will be a thrilling experience for some of your students, but it might also prove nerve-wracking for others. To prepare students for this event, consider the following in advance of the conference:

- What are the expectations for students’ behavior?
- What kind of questions should they ask, and how will they present their work to the keynote speaker?
- How can they best prepare for this meeting?
- What should teachers do if students are nervous, disruptive, or unprepared?

The preparatory materials listed below will help you and your students develop a deeper sense of Valeria Luiselli and what to expect at the Annual Student Conference and how to prepare for it.

**POINTS FOR THE LECTURE**

**Prepare your students for meeting Valeria Luiselli**

Emphasize that, like all people, our keynote speaker is a person who could be nervous, excited, happy, sad, shy, in a good or bad mood, etc., on the day of the conference. Show students clips of her doing interviews and various examples of her projects so they can think of her as an individual from the start. These are some links that may help you to gather information about the author:

- [MacArthur Foundation](#)
- [Valeria Luiselli Website](#)
- [YouTube Clips](#)
• Valeria Luiselli’s Instagram

**Emphasize being courteous and respectful.**

Those students designated to ask questions during the keynote should always greet and thank Valeria Luiselli, introduce themselves by name and school affiliation, and then ask a question. Encourage students to make eye contact and to be polite and confident!

**Help students avoid feelings of anxiety.**

When preparing your students, focus on the experience, not the “performance” or act of talking to Valeria Luiselli. Emphasize that she is coming to the conference precisely because she is interested in and excited about the ideas that students have developed as they’ve read *Lost Children Archive*. Know that she thinks students have something to say that is worth hearing. Emphasize that this is a dialogue, meaning that student voices matter and she wants to hear from them as much as they want to hear from her.

**Encourage them to be specific.**

Ask students to avoid being superficial and say things like “I love this book!” or “I hate this book!” Students should be prepared to articulate what they loved most about the novel and why. In preparation, ask your class to consider what was most inspiring, thought-provoking, or challenging about the text.

**Tips for asking questions:**

- Encourage students to ask open-ended questions that do not have simple “yes” or “no” answers. Instead of the yes or no questions, instruct them to ask questions that allow room for thoughts, comments, and interpretations.

- Consider the “lead in” to the questions in which students give a little context (2-3 sentences) to let the author know where they are coming from. For example, “Why did you write [X] this way?” would be a much more interesting question if the student first explained why [X] is interesting or confusing to her/him/them.
Questions that show a student’s passion are always a wonderful way to engage with the writer. Still, authors will be able to offer a more satisfying answer if the student’s question is specific. For example, instead of asking, “What happens to the boy and the girl after the family separates? Does the girl ever hear the recording the boy makes for her? I need to know!”, students can say, “The ending doesn’t really resolve what happens to some of the characters after the family separates—like, for example, whether the boy and the girl get to meet again, or if the mother plays the boy’s recordings for the daughter when she is older. I’m curious why you finished the novel this way.”

Since the novel delves into the socio-historical context of the US-Mexico border, encourage students to ask questions that connect themes in the book to the real historical and current events.

Invite students to ask questions that explore the author’s use of language, narrative techniques, or unconventional storytelling methods in the novel.

**Sample keynote questions:**

To help your students understand what makes a model question, please see below for a list of keynote questions from the Great World Texts program, which were posed by students to Tommy Orange, author of *There There* in 2023. These questions cover creative process, characters, identity, plot, and reception.

1. What inspired you to write this novel?
2. What strengths and limitations did you weigh as you selected your narrative style for *There There*?
3. While writing the book did you ever find it hard to put your ideas to paper? How did you overcome it?
4. Did you have any specific music you listened to while writing this book? Were there specific song you listened to while writing as each character?
5. Will you share what connections you have with your characters? What kind of research goes into building their stories?
6. Could you see *There There* as a movie or tv show? If so, do you have an idea of who you would cast for one of the characters?
7. What message would you have for people who identify with Orvil, particularly those trying to explore their identity?

8. At the end of the novel, the fate of Orvil is unclear; Can you tell us why you chose to write the ending this way?

9. This novel contains many mature elements. What would you say to those who seek to ban novels like this one from schools due to so-called “objectionable” content?

10. What were some of the messages that you hoped audiences would take away from this book? Was your intended impact similar or different from the response you have received from readers?

11. What have you learned from writing *There There*? What has this experience taught you?

**Be prepared.**

Ask students to imagine how Valeria Luiselli might react to a given question. Once you’ve chosen which questions to ask the keynote speaker, role-play possible answers as a class. Prepare a list of follow-up questions, too. Students might find listening to this Q&A with Luiselli helpful to give them a sense of what to expect.

**On decorum.**

This conference will be a serious academic affair and a lot of planning has gone into this event by teachers, students, UW faculty, staff, etc. The people in attendance have spent months preparing for this event. Disruptive, discourteous, or disrespectful behavior is unacceptable. Teachers whose students do not follow the decorum guidelines are expected to remove them from the room immediately.

**Suggested Questions for Discussion:**

- How would you like to be treated (or not) if you were the keynote speaker of this conference? And if you were a student from another school?
- What questions do you most want to be answered? What do you want to know about *Lost Children Archive*?
• Hold a conference dress rehearsal. If your group of participating students is small, this might consist of each student giving a brief but formal presentation of her project, followed by a question-and-answer session. If your participating students are large, split them into two groups. Have one group present their projects first and the other second. Students will alternate between presenting and viewing, just as they will on the official conference day.

• Role-play meeting Valeria Luiselli. Have students prepared with questions, and practice asking and answering them. What questions got the best (or worst) answers? Why?

• Brainstorm productive questions. In small groups, students should write down as many questions as they can think of to ask the author. Then switch questions with other groups and select those which seem best and those which seem least effective. Use this as the basis for a discussion about how we decide if a question is “good” or “bad.” Hint: the least effective questions are too easy to answer, produce obvious answers, or could easily be answered by anyone reading the book. You might have students revise with this discussion in mind, practicing how to construct clear, direct, and interesting questions.