

Teaching Anything for Selena



Episode One: Selena and Me

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Anything for Selena: Episode One - Selena and Me

About Anything for Selena

On March 31, 1995, nine-year-old Maria Garcia came home to find her mother glued to the TV, tears rolling down her rosy cheeks. The phone kept ringing. Relatives in Mexico and the States wanted to know if Maria's family was watching, too. American networks and Mexican programming aired the same top story. Selena Quintanilla, the Grammy-winning ascending Mexican American popstar had been killed — swiftly, violently — by the president of her fan club.

The story shook the country and changed Maria's life.

In *Anything For Selena*, Maria goes on an intimate, revelatory quest to understand how Selena has become a potent symbol for tensions around race, class and body politics in the United States.

The series weaves Maria's personal story as a queer, first-generation Mexican immigrant with cultural analysis, history and politics to explore how, 25 years after her death, Selena remains an unparalleled vessel for understanding Latino identity and American belonging.

Anything for Selena is a co-production with Futuro Studios, a new podcast studio focused on storytelling from POC perspectives and representing the new American mainstream. Futuro Studios is a division of Futuro Media, a non-profit production company founded in 2010 by award-winning journalist Maria Hinojosa, and the company behind the longstanding public radio program Latino USA, among other programming.

Meet Maria Garcia

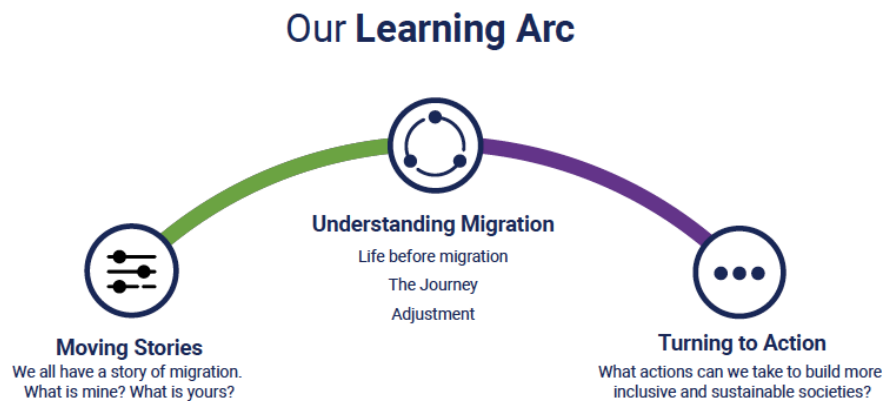
Maria Garcia is the Senior Editor of Arts and Culture at WBUR, where she leads The ARTery, overseeing a team of arts writers, reporters and cultural critics. She was born in Ciudad Juarez and was raised there and in El Paso, Texas where her family immigrated to when she was 3 years old. She was a broadcast journalist along the U.S. - Mexico border for more than a decade. After that, she transitioned to arts and culture reporting and narrative radio storytelling. She holds a Masters Degree in Arts and Culture Journalism from Columbia Journalism School. She's also a queer chola who listens to Selena when she needs some motivation.

About Episode One

Growing up along the U.S.-Mexico border, Maria Garcia felt torn between her two identities as Mexican and American. But then, something changed her life. She discovered Selena — the

Mexican-American pop icon who proved she didn't have to choose. In the premiere episode of "Anything for Selena," host Maria Garcia explores how Selena helped Maria find her own place in the world.

Connections to the Re-Imagining Migration Learning Arc



The tag line for the podcast Anything for Selena is "a podcast about belonging." Central to developing a healthy sense of belonging is a feeling of equilibrium between one's personal identity, one's cultural background, and the dominant culture. The process of finding one's place, while often uncomfortable, also can create new possibilities and growth. At the same time, going through the process of balancing cultures, adjusting, and finding one's place of belonging can create tension and be uncomfortable.

The podcast Anything for Selena explores those tensions and this first episode introduces the themes of adjustment and belonging. Below are a series of big questions from the Re-Imagining Migration Learning Arc that we would use to frame this entire podcast series.

What are the conditions in the new land?

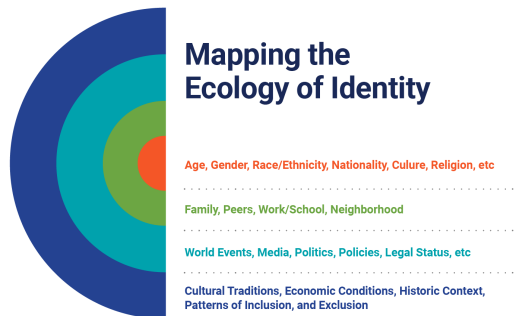
- How might the environment in the new land help or hinder newcomers' inclusion?
- How do newcomers come to understand the new land and their place in it over time?
- How might newcomers and the receiving community balance their identities, cultural values and worldview as they interact with one another?

Guiding Questions

- What does it take for people to feel at home in their identity and their community?
- What role do images in media play in the way we develop our identities?
- How does seeing our stories represented publicly impact how we see ourselves?

Part 1: Before Listening

Identities in Context:



Reflect on your identity and how it is shaped by the world around you. All of us develop our identities within a social and cultural context. To a certain extent, that context influences the opportunities we have in life and our ability to express ourselves as we wish. Psychologist Uri Bronfenbrenner captured the influence of the environment on children's identities through his Ecological Framework. He tried to identify the various forces that shape the way we develop our sense of self.

Identifying the way each layer of the ecological model relates to our identity is particularly helpful for exploring how newcomers develop their identities in a new land because they, or their family members, have recently transitioned from one social and cultural context to another. Therefore, the relationship between their identities and their environment has changed. Helping to isolate those changes can clarify how people navigate their lives in a new land.

Before beginning the discussion of the podcast, create an ecological identity map for yourself. Throughout the guide, we encourage students to create a similar map for the characters we are introduced to by Maria Garcia.

Belonging:

Anything for Selena is a podcast about belonging.

- What does belonging mean?
- How does it feel to belong?
- How does it feel when you don't belong?
- How do you know if you belong? What signs would you look for? What feelings?
- How do you develop a sense of belonging?
- What role do others play in facilitating belonging (or creating a sense of exclusion)?
- What can you do to help create that sense of belonging? For yourself? And for others?

Feeling New:

Reflect on a time when you were new to a group - it could be a school, a community, a religious institution, a job, or a group of friends. Consider:

- What did that feel like?

- Were you ever able to develop a sense of belonging?
 - If you were, how did that happen?
 - If you were not, what got in the way?
- How did you learn the expectations of the community?
- How did the group change because of your presence? How did you change as a result of your participation?

Who is Your Selena?

Selena meant a lot to Maria Garcia as she grew up and she still is important to her. We will explore the reasons why throughout this guide. However, before we do that, think of a public figure you identify with; it could be a musician, actor/actress, writer, visual artist, athlete, or something else. Consider:

- Why do you think they matter to you?
- How are they similar to you? How are they different?
- What is it about them that you connect to?

Part 2: A Close Listen to the Podcast

A Note to the Teacher:

You may choose to ask students to listen to the podcast ahead of time, or you might listen together as a whole group. Some educators prefer to listen to the entire episode as a whole, offering students an opportunity to let their responses lead the reflection before turning to specific ideas or sections. Others prefer to have a more directed discussion from the beginning. If time allows, we believe it is beneficial to allow students to begin the discussion based on their own responses. Doing that can help you make explicit the ways that their identities, experiences, and perspectives shape the way they respond to what they see, read, or hear.

Reflection Questions:

1. After describing emigrating to the U.S. with her family. Maria explains, *"This was my early life: Mexico on the weekend, the States during the week."* What do you notice about the way she talks about her two worlds? In the suggested activities before listening, we encouraged students to create an ecological identity map for themselves. Create one for Elena in both places, Ciudad Juarez and on the outskirts of El Paso. Maria describes both places in the narration, you might do some additional research to fill in further details.
2. At the 4:50 point in the first episode Maria tells us that her teacher changed her name. She explains:

Soon I started school. And on the first day of 1st grade, my teacher called me Mary. My actual name is Maria Elena -- a name passed down from my grandmother. My mom says no one ever asked her if changing my name from Maria Elena to Mary was okay. She just kind of found out in an open house.

MARIA'S MOM: Pues si, fui al Open House...

MARIA (translating): When my teacher started talking about Mary

MARIA'S MOM: Me dice la maestra usted es la mamá de Mary...

MARIA (translating): And she was like, "who's that?"

MARIA'S MOM: Dije, "cual Mary? Mary, oh!"

MARIA (translating): It didn't really even occur to my mom to object. She didn't speak English. We were undocumented. So she was like okay, I guess they'll call her Mary le pusieron Mary a mi hija, pues bueno, esta bien. (chuckles).

MARIA: My name soon became a source of ridicule. Whenever a substitute teacher said my real name-- Maria -- kids would say, "Ewww--a Mexican name!" I remember what it felt like as shame took form inside of me.

Consider using the Project Zero Thinking Routines Below to reflect on what Maria tells us about what it felt like for her and her mother to have the teacher change her name.

- You might begin with a more general discussion that captures the various perspectives in the room following [See Feel Think Wonder: A thinking routine for nurturing close observation, curiosity, and self-awareness](#)
 - To follow up and explore how Maria, her mother, and the teacher might have thought about the incident, use [Step in – Step Out – Step Back: A thinking routine to take social/cultural perspective responsibly](#).
3. Names are deeply tied to our identities and sense of self. They often carry family and cultural traditions as well. What was lost when Maria became Mary? How might that impact the way Maria saw herself and the way others saw her?

Akanksha Gupta, a former program coordinator at Re-Imagining Migration shares her own experiences with her name at school and some exercises to explore these issues in class in this [blog](#). One simple, but profound activity is asking students to spend two or three minutes doing a free write about their names. It could be their first name or their last name, or it could even be a nickname. Once they are finished, ask them to think about what they are willing to share with others. We love using this exercise with students as it stimulates thoughtful, engaged conversations.

Sandra Cisneros's novel [*The House on Mango Street*](#) begins with a reflection on the protagonist's name, Esperanza. Consider introducing the passage if you want to extend this reflection on names and identity.

4. Maria explains that her school had a clearly defined hierarchy around assimilating to the dominant American culture. At the 6:02 mark, she explains,

In the 3rd grade, a classmate found some paperwork in the school office that said I was born in Juarez. He confronted me like I was hoarding a shameful secret and he'd found me out. I panicked. I said there must have been a mistake. This kid who confronted me -- he was white, the son of a wealthy farmer who employed seasonal Mexican workers. Kids like him were at the top of the elementary school hierarchy. Opposite were the kids of the Mexican farmworkers. My school was predominantly Latino but the pecking order rewarded only the most assimilated of kids. These moments of shame, of lying -- they feel like some of the oldest wounds in me. But I thought I needed to be Mary. Mary spoke English perfectly. She was American. And I did kind of become Mary. Soon I was more articulate in English. Kids in Mexico called me a *pocha*, a Mexican American who debases the culture with our crass, working class Spanglish. And I felt a rejection, a stigma in both countries. I toggled between Mary and Maria, switching at either side of the border. In both places, it felt like the other half of me was missing. Like these two parts of myself were divorced from each other. A gash inside of me separating them. The border defined me. And divided me.

Consider asking students to think about the following questions that connect to this passage:

- How do you explain the pecking order at Maria's school?
 - Where do the ideas about who is on top of the hierarchy come from in schools? What role does the community beyond the classroom play?
 - How do hierarchies play out in your school?
 - What does the pecking order look like in your school?
 - Why do you think schools, communities, and societies have pecking orders? Why are immigrants so often treated like they are near the bottom of those hierarchies?
5. Near the 8-minute mark of the episode, we are introduced to Selena. How would you describe the impact of Selena on Maria's life? Listen to Maria's voice in the narration closely. What do you hear when she talks about Selena? What do you imagine her facial expression is like as she is speaking?

- Why do you think Selena mattered to her so much?
- Identify a detail or two that stands out from the description and explain why that it feels important to you

6. Maria explains, *“Selena switched between Spanish and English, Mexican and American in the public eye. And there were no cruel jokes, no shame in her accent, just adoration. She’d declare herself a proud Mexican.”* Some people describe that as code-switching. When you code switch, you adjust your vocabulary and speaking style to the audience that you are addressing.

- Can you think of ways that you code-switch appropriately?
- To code switch, what do you have to know?
- What do you have to understand?
- Why do you think it is important to be able to code-switch?

7. One way that bilingual speakers innovate linguistically is to “translanguage.” When people translanguage they bring elements of two formal languages together into one when they communicate. Maria Garcia talks about Spanglish throughout this podcast series. Listen for examples of “Spanglish” or translanguageing throughout this episode and others. Do you ever find yourself translanguageing? What about your friends and family?

8. Maria remembers,

“To me, It was as if she’d (Selena) told Mexico, “I don’t sound like you but this heritage is mine to claim, too.”

SELENA: Yo no tuve la oportunidad de aprender español cuando yo estaba muy chica pero ahora es el tiempo. Nunca es tarde para acercarse de a sus raíces. [I didn’t have the opportunity to learn Spanish when I was a girl but now is the time. It is never too late to get closer to your roots.]

MARIA: It’s never too late to get close to your roots, she’d say. Her identity as a Mexican American wasn’t some novel detail people would find out about her. No -- it was central to her presentation as an artist and as a person. She was explicitly Mexican American.

- Why do you think it mattered to Maria that Selena spoke imperfect Spanish?
- How might her imperfect Spanish impact her popularity on both sides of the US/Mexico border?

9. Having a role model with whom to identify can play a crucial role in development and finding one's place in society. Maria explains, *"It felt surreal to see someone like me making it on her own terms. One of ours--those of us in the middle who felt like we weren't enough-- enough to be fully Mexican or fully American. But Selena was enough. In both places. And that meant that maybe I could be enough."*

- Do you have a cultural role model? Someone with an identity you share that means a lot to you?
- How do they impact the way you think about yourself? And your community?

10. According to Maria after Selena's murder, *"Suddenly, Latinos, especially working-class Mexican American people were everywhere on TV. Crying for her on the street, talking about what she meant to them...I remember how rare it felt to see so many people like me on TV. We played her music loud. We mourned her out loud. Maybe, we were finally ourselves out loud."*

- If a reporter, who was unfamiliar with Selena, asked you to explain the response to her death, what would you tell them?
- Based on this first episode, what would you want them to know?

11. For many people in the U.S., watching the response to Selena's death was the first time they were exposed to a hugely popular U.S.-born cultural figure that they were not aware of.

- What are the possible ways that people from the dominant society might respond?
- Why might do you think they respond that way?

12. The image at the beginning of this guide was created to represent this particular episode of Anything for Selena. Look closely at it. Try using this routine to consider what story it tells.

- Describe the image as objectively as possible. Note the colors. The details.
- Analyze the choices. Consider why you think the artist included the details that they did.
- Interpret the image as a whole. What story does it tell? How does that story connect to your take-aways from this episode?