



*Tío Emilio's Story*  
A Tale From  
**NICARAGUA**

*Inspired and made possible by Tío Emilio and his family*

*Authored by Hania Mariën*

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Mural in Masaya, Nicaragua

*Mil gracias a Tío Emilio y  
su familia*

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## Preface

### A note to teachers:

Nicaragua is a beautiful country with lakes, volcanoes, waterfalls, and forests. It is home to many kind and generous people. Yet much of the popular memory and knowledge of the country reduces Nicaragua to its time in conflict.

This resource is intended to offer students an insight into education and life in Nicaragua from 1967-1990, as experienced by one child on Isla Ometepe. While conflict and poverty can adversely impact educational opportunity, education can also act as a motivating force in difficult times. While about pursuing education in a time of conflict, the story shared in this resource is also about resilience and persistence. At its core, it is about learning to be a child – to play with your brothers, to work, to pursue an education, and follow your dreams.

Tío Emilio's story is unique, and his opportunities are in many ways shaped by his childhood on Isla Ometepe. I invite you and your students to learn with and from Tío Emilio, and consider how others may have been impacted differently by conflict in the country.

This resource is inspired by the Zinn Education Project's [Inside the Volcano – A Curriculum on Nicaragua](#), Teaching Tolerance's [Critical Practices for Anti-bias Education](#), and Tío Emilio's story. Through Tío Emilio's story, the intent is to help students critically engage with Nicaraguan history, the United States' involvement in the country and how conflict, and military regimes can impact education.

### Who is this curriculum for?

This resource was created with mixed grade classrooms in mind, including mixed after school program classrooms serving students grade 4-6. I assume little to know prior knowledge of Nicaragua.

A variety of activities are included to allow you to pick and choose those which best fit the learning needs of your students. There are two “versions” of *Tío Emilio's Story*: the first, which makes up the body of the document, contains integrated **Stop and Think** sections with comprehension and reflection questions, **Learn** sections with historical or contextual information, and **From the Archives** sections with excerpts from real newspaper articles; the second, at the end of the document, stands alone. You may choose to use the story on its own, or to read the story on its own as a class, and then to have students work through this resource independently.

## A note on content

Please note that Tío Emilio's story, and the historical content within this document discusses military regimes, armed violence, mass executions and leaving home. Prior to engaging with *Tío Emilio's Story* I suggest considering what resources might help you use the story as a jumping off point for talking with children about conflict and violence in developmentally-appropriate ways. While no one strategy will work for every classroom setting, here are a few resources that might be helpful"

1. **Establishing Norms:** Begin by setting norms for the discussion. Teaching for Change's resources on creating [Classroom Contracts](#) might be helpful here.
2. **Thinking about conflict:** One strategy that might be useful before considering societal conflicts is to walk students through interpersonal conflicts they might be more familiar with. Here is one example of an activity that could help guide this discussion.

### Story 1: Unintended conflict

*Pick two children from the class. Student A sits at a desk reading a book (or using another object). Student B is "outside of the classroom" (off stage) and doesn't see that Student A is reading the book. Student A gets up to get a drink of water and leaves their book on the table. Student B walks in and sees the book and thinks it is interesting, and decide they want to read it. Student B picks up the book and walks to a different table and begins reading. Student A now re-enters the room and sees that Student B took their book.*

Ask the students what Student A might say happened (example: "I left my book on the table while I get a drink of water and Student B took my book"). Ask the students what Student B might say happened (example: "The book was sitting on the table and no one was using it, so I decided to read it"). Ask students why they think the Student A's and Student B's stories are not the same. Ask students what think really happened. Who do they believe? Why?

Then ask students to think of a few ways they might think about resolving the conflict.

### Story 2: Intentional exertion of power dynamics

*Now tell the students to rewind and imagine a different scenario: Student A purposefully took something [i.e. a book] from Student B.*

Ask the students what Student A might say happened (example: "I took Student B's book because they wouldn't give me my eraser). Ask the students what Student B might say happened (example: "Student A took my book because they don't like me). Ask students why they think the Student A's and Student B's stories are not the same. Ask students what think really happened. Who do they believe? Why?

Then ask students to think of a few ways they might think about resolving the conflict.

### Reflection

Guide students in a discussion about what differences they see in the two scenarios. Some example questions you might ask include:

1. Did you see any differences between what happened in the first story and the second story? How were the outcomes similar/different for Student A and B? Does it matter?

- a. One difference, for example, might be motivation of Student B in both stories. A follow up question might be: does motivation matter?
  - b. You might also be interested in prompting other questions such as: Does taking something away from someone hurt them? What if it is something that they need to live?
2. How did they two sides of the story differ for Student A and Student B in each story? Why do you think the stories were different? Can you think of a time you had a conflict with someone and you both told the story of what happened in different ways?
3. If you have a problem-solving/conflict resolution framework at your school, this could be a good opportunity to connect this conversation to your school's processes.

Before wrapping up, you could discuss how in conflicts there are often multiple sides of a story. Drawing on the two stories acted out in class, you can point out that what one person says happens isn't always what another person thinks happened. It would be helpful to explicitly connect this back to societal conflict to help students understand how thinking about the multiple "sides" that we might hear in interpersonal conflicts might help us think about the "sides" in societal conflicts. For example, you could tell students: As we begin reading *Tío Emilio's Story*, think about how someone else might have understood what happened. The political bias activity included as a resource at the end of this document could provide an opportunity to more concretely reflect on how the writing and telling of history can present a biased narrative.

### 3. Additional resources:

- a. [Teaching Tolerance's Exploring Conflict and Social Change Learning Plan](#) could also be a helpful resource.
- b. Social Justice Books' [Early Childhood: Conflict Resolution with Young Children](#) book list could provide alternate stories through which to encourage

## A note to students:

Welcome! *Tío Emilio's Story* is inspired by the life of a real person. While "Tío Emilio" is a pseudonym (a fake name used to protect Tío Emilio's real identity), the events that Tío Emilio recounts are all things that happened in his real life. The character of Antonio, Tío Emilio's nephew who narrates the story, is inspired by one of Tío Emilio's nephews.

*Tío Emilio's Story* is based on an interview with Tío Emilio, and my time visiting his family and living in Nicaragua. Some details of the story have been added to the story to create a narrative arc (a story with a beginning, a middle and an end). All of the photographs are from my own time in Nicaragua.

I am beyond thankful to Tío Emilio for being willing to share his story, and welcoming me with open arms to learn about *Isla Ometepe*.

## Glossary of Spanish Words:

Abuela (Abueh-lo) – grandmother

Abuelo (Abueh-lah)– grandfather

Cafetalero (Kah-feh-ta-leh-ro) – someone who picks coffee

Chocoyo (Choh-koh-yoh)– parakeet

Claro (Kla-roh) – of course

Dale Pues (Dah-leh Pw-es)– okay

Esposa (Eh-spoh-sah) - wife

Guardabarranco (Goo-ah-r-da-ba-rr-an-ko) – national bird of Nicaragua

Hermanos (ehr-ma-nos) –brothers or siblings

Mamá (Mam-ah)– mother

Monos (Mo-nos)– monkeys

Ometepe (Oh-meh-teh-peh)– an island in Lake Nicaragua, also known as Cocibolca

Pamá (Pap-ah)– father

Tío (Tee-oh)– uncle

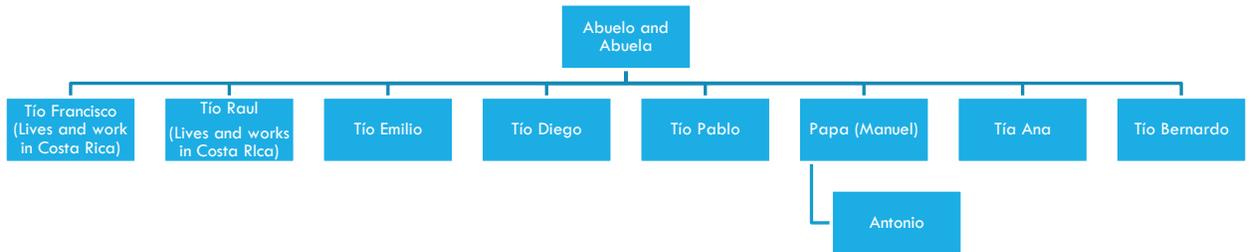
# Map of Nicaragua



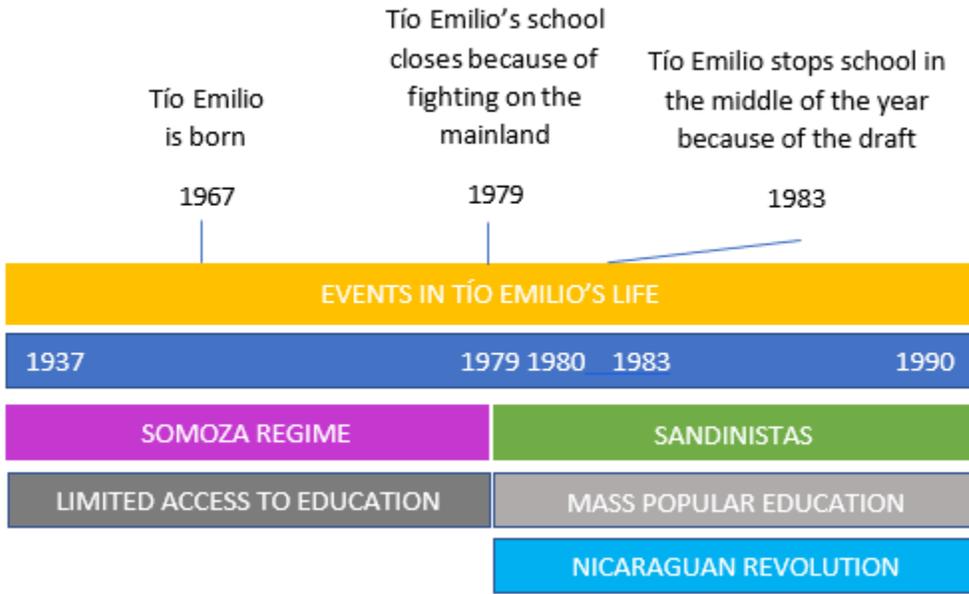
Above: [Source](#) Below: [Source](#)



# Antonio's Family Tree



# Timeline of Major Events





## Opening Reflection

1. Reflect: What, if anything, have you heard about Nicaragua or Costa Rica? Where or whom did you hear this from?
2. Think: Can you find Nicaragua and Costa Rica on a globe or map? What country lies to the North of Nicaragua? What country lies to the South?

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# TÍO EMILIO'S STORY

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## Part 1

My name is Antonio. I live on an island that was created by a volcano, millions of years ago.

We call the island Ometepe, and it sits in the largest lake in the world. There are two volcanoes on the island, and sometimes one of the volcanoes still coughs big clouds of ash into the air. When this happens they have to close the schools.

I live with my three *hermanos*, Mamá, Papá and Abuelo. My *hermanos* and I like to go swimming in the lake around Ometepe. Sometimes we play tag in the shallow water. The monkeys by our house play tag in the trees, too. Sometimes I think they can understand us, but Pablo, my older brother says they can't. Pablo is in secondary school. He thinks he knows everything.

Today, my Tío Emilio, one of my Papá's *hermanos* is coming to visit. Tío Emilio works in Costa Rica. I have never left Ometepe, and Costa Rica seems really far away. It takes Emilio 12 hours to get here. First he takes three buses from Juntas to Peñas Blancas, which is what they call the border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. From there he takes a taxi to the port of San Jorge, where he hops on a ferry to the port of Moyogalpa, here on Ometepe. My *hermano* meets Tío Emilio with the motorcycle at the port.

Sometimes we're allowed to go with Pablo to pick up Tío Emilio, but most of the time we just run down our dirt road when we hear the rumble of the engine. When we get close, Pablo slows down the motorcycle, and Tío Emilio says "you can't catch me!" And races us home.

Tío Emilio helps with lots of things when he comes home. But my favorite part of Tío Emilio coming home are his stories. Sometimes they are about far away lands where *chocoyos* and monkeys tango to the rhythm of the waves. Sometimes they are about the Nicaraguan *cafetaleros* where he works in Costa Rica. I wonder what type of story he will bring with him today.



View from the ferry



## Stop and Think

1. Identify: Who is Antonio? Where does he live?
2. Recall: Why do they have to close the schools sometimes on the island?
3. Hypothesize: Why do you think Antonio has never left the island of Ometepe?
4. Predict: Why do you think Tío Emilio lives in Costa Rica?
5. Activity: Can you draw Tío Emilio's journey on the map (included in the [Activities](#) section of this document)?

## Part 2

It is midday, and we don't want to be anywhere but the shade. We settle down where we always do for Tío Emilio's stories, under the Tamarind tree. The monkeys sit still in the tree above us, as if they are coming to listen, too. Tío Emilio swings his chair around so he can fold his arms across the back of the chair. Abuelo sits as he always does, hands on his cane, looking out across the lake. Abuelo doesn't talk much. Most of what I have learned about him has come from Papá and his *hermanos*. I never knew my Abuela, either, but she isn't mentioned much. She passed away before I was born.

My *hermanos* and I, we are four boys total. Today my older *hermanos*, Papá and the Tíos are helping fix a friend's fence, so they will be back a little later. Mamá is off with the *esposas* of Tíos Diego, Pablo and Bernardo. They are cooking dinner at Tía Ana's house and will bring it over later.

So for now, it's just me, *Abuelo* and the monkeys, waiting for Tío Emilio's story.



Volcán Concepción

“A long, long time ago, more than five of your lifetimes,” Tío Emilio begins, his big brown eyes reflecting the triangle shape of Volcán Concepción in the distance, “I was a little boy just like you. We lived on the other side of the island - all eight of us *hermanos*, Mamá and Papá. We too splashed around in the warm water, and watched the *monos* dance in the trees and the *guardabarranco* flash his bright blue tail.

And just like you, Antonio, us Tíos, we listened to music. “Do you remember that Papá? How we listened to music?” Tío Emilio asked Abuelo.

Abuelo nodded. I was surprised when he responded, his voice quiet but steady. “*Claro*, Emilio. That old radio introduced you to the sounds of faraway places, to a world beyond Ometepe.”

Tío Emilio laughed, “Yes it did. Through our radio we listened to the ‘gimme, gimme, gimme’ of ABBA, to the “oh-oh-oh” of Laura Branigan - remember that Papá? And the “all you need is love, love...love is all you need” - the Beatles, remember Papá? Remember that?” Abuelo nodded, but didn’t say anything more.

“One day as I sang along,” Tío Emilio continued, turning towards me, “your Tío Francisco told me, ‘silly brother, you will never know what they are saying.’ ‘Maybe my *hermano* was right,’ I thought, ‘how will I ever know those words? School is already so far away and we can barely pay for my books and supplies. How could I ask for more?’ Because Papá worked so hard for us, and wanted us to go to school. Right Papá?” Tío Emilio asked Abuelo. “You and Mamá always told us, ‘study so you do not grow up to work with a machete. Study so you will not be out working all day in the sun.’”

“Sí, and Mamá and I made sure you brought your books with you when we worked in the fields,” said Abuelo. “That was important when the schools closed because of the fighting on the mainland so you wouldn’t fall behind.”

“But why were the schools closed, Tío? Who was fighting?” I asked.

“Because of the war, Antonio. It was the start of the revolution. The fighting never reached the island, but there were teachers who didn’t come from the mainland because they were scared. It was hard to know where the fighting was happening. It wasn’t always in one place. You never knew when it might reach where you lived. My school was only closed for about half a year. But I would imagine some schools that were closer to the violence were closed for longer. But so I told myself no, Antonio, my *hermano* is not right. I told myself, ‘One day I will know the words. One day I will make Mamá and Papá proud.’”

“But how did you learn Tío? How did you learn English?” I asked, looking first to Tío Emilio, and then to Abuelo. “And why were people fighting?”

It was Abuelo who answered. “People fight for all kinds of reasons, Antonio. For many years Nicaragua had been peaceful. But there came a time when those in power, the Somoza regime, only cared about themselves and their friends. Many people could not go to school or get help if they were sick. And people were very poor. Eventually people decided enough was enough, and a group called the Sandinistas overthrew the people who had been in power. That was the start of the revolution.”

## Learn

*What was going on in Nicaragua during this time? Who was Somoza, who were the Sandinistas, and why was there a revolution?*

Just like the United States has a president, Nicaragua has a president too. Nicaragua's president at this time was not elected by popular vote. The Nicaraguan president at this time, Luis Somoza Debayle, succeeded his father, Antonio Somoza Garcia. This father and son team is sometimes referred to as the Somozas. The time that the Somozas were in power is sometimes called the Somoza regime. While the Somozas were technically called "presidents," the Somozas did not share their power with other branches of power like the president of the United States is supposed to. Because of this the Somoza regime is often called a dictatorship.

The Somozas were not very good at sharing power or money. When they did share, they mostly shared with their friends. For example, the Somoza family owned nearly all of the land in Nicaragua during Tío Emilio's childhood. Many of the families Tío Emilio met on the mainland were called colonos. Colonos were people who didn't own land to farm on. Because of this they had to loan it from someone, and because the Somoza family owned so much land, people often loaned the land from them. For most of these families, the only income they had came from farm labor, so they couldn't pay to loan or rent the land in cash. Instead, they would plant the crops, and the end of the harvest they paid half of the harvest to the Somoza family. This prevented most families from saving money year to year, and were mostly stuck in a cycle of barely having enough to survive.

The Somozas were also known to do wasteful and selfish things with government money. For example, after an earthquake that devastated much of the country's buildings in the capital city and elsewhere in 1972, President Somoza Debayle used some of the relief aid provided to the country for himself. Under the Somoza regime, many citizens were denied access to basic healthcare and education. There were not very many schools, which made it hard for many families, especially families in rural areas to send their kids to school.

After a while many people in Nicaragua grew tired of these leaders. They wanted access to healthcare and education. They wanted change. In some governments you can vote when you want change. However, the people of Nicaragua saw that the Somozas would rather keep money for themselves rather than provide access to healthcare and education. Because of this, many people in Nicaragua believed a revolution was the only way to get this change. It was not that the people of Nicaragua wanted a war, but they realized that maybe a war was the only means for change.

A new political group called the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza regime in 1979. The Sandinistas wanted everyone to have access to education. They started a National Literacy Campaign with the goal of teaching everyone to read. At this period in time, that meant that almost everyone who knew how to read would have to teach someone else how to read! Because of the National Literacy Campaign, many adults who had not been able to go to school because of the Somoza regime learned how to read. Leaders of the National Literacy Campaign worked out of homes and community centers rather than just schools, which made it easier to teach people in rural areas. Abuelo and Abuela in our story learned how to read as a result of this National Literacy Campaign.

While access to education increased for many people after the Sandinistas came to power, schools also shut down during the transfer of power from the Somozas to the Sandinistas. This was because there was fighting and it wasn't always safe to go outside. The fighting that started in 1979 is sometimes called the Nicaraguan Civil War, and sometimes the Nicaraguan Revolution. Some people called it a civil war because it was a conflict between groups inside the country's borders. Some people called it a revolution because the Sandinistas fought to overthrow the Somoza regime and were trying to create a "new" Nicaragua.

You may also hear the term Contras in relation to the Nicaraguan conflict. The Contras were right-wing rebel groups fighting against the Sandinistas as soon as they came into power in 1979. The name Contras comes from the Spanish word *contra*, or against, and is short for *la contrarevolución*, or the counterrevolution. The Contras committed many human rights violations, and were supported by the United States government.

The war isn't necessarily the type of war you see depicted in history books; there were no lines of organized armies marching toward each other or people fighting in trenches. The war in Nicaragua is sometimes called a guerilla war because the Contras were "regular" people fighting against members of the national army. (In the timeline at the beginning of the document, the Contras were fighting during the box that says "Nicaraguan Revolution").

People generally talk about the Nicaraguan Civil War, or Nicaraguan Revolution as lasting from 1979-1990. During this time there was more than one conflict happening at once. You will read more about this in the next section.

## Stop and Think

1. Analyze: Why was Nicaragua at war? Who/what were the main sides?
2. Hypothesize: Why do you think fighting never reached the island?
3. Recall and Hypothesize: What impact did the fighting have on Tío Emilio's school? Why do you think some schools might have been closed for longer than others?
4. Infer: Why do you think it was so important to Abuelo for Tío Emilio to go to school?
5. Identify and Connect: What does Tío Emilio want to do to make Mama and Papa proud? Is there anything you have ever wanted to do to make someone proud in your life?

## VOCABULARY

**Regime** – A regime refers to a leader and/or a group of people who run a government.

**Dictatorship** – a form of government where a leader or small group rules with nearly unlimited power; dictators often take power by force or by misleading people, for example by manipulating elections.

**Revolution** – overthrow of a regime (or government) by those who are governed

**Guerrilla war** – war fought by “regular” people, not members of a national army or police forces

**Human rights** - Human rights ensure that all people are treated with dignity and equality. We all have the right to access basic needs such as food, water and shelter. These rights protect us from violence and abuse and work towards the end of ignorance and hatred. No matter what country we live in, who our parents are or what religion we practice, human rights are essential.

<http://www.kidsgoglobal.net/the-issues/human-rights>

**Overthrow** – to forcibly remove someone from power

## DID YOU KNOW?

ABBA, Laura Branigan and the Beatles were all musical groups/artists that were popular when Tío Emilio was a young boy.

## From the Archives

Below is an edited version<sup>1</sup> of a real newspaper article published on March 23, 1987. The newspaper article discusses how the war in Nicaragua impacted everyday life on mainland Nicaragua, including education. As you read, think about how the experience of children on the mainland may have differed from Tío Emilio's experience on the mainland. When you are done reading, answer the questions in the Stop and Think section below.

Original source can be found here: <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/03/23/world/casualties-in-nicaragua-schools-and-health-care.html>



Photograph of the real newspaper article published in 1987

## *The New York Times*

### Casualties in Nicaragua: Schools and Healthcare

March 23, 1987

More children attend the local school in El Crucero than ever before. But the teachers are young and not fully **qualified**, books are scarce and some parents complain that their children are being educated with a **political bias**.

#### War Takes Its Toll

Conditions in the poor farming village of El Crucero reflect those across Nicaragua. Health care and education are more accessible to more Nicaraguans than before the **dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle** was ousted in 1979, But the services are often inadequate because there is not enough money and qualified professionals have fled.

Nicaragua's war with the United States-backed **Contras** has been a cause of the decline. But sweeping changes in the health and education systems, which many specialists say were made without thorough study, and the low pay and inadequate training of teachers and health workers have also taken their toll.

When the **Sandinista Government** came to power in 1979, it raised public expectations by promising dramatic improvements in Nicaragua's long neglected education and health care.

#### No Money for Books

But many Nicaraguans say conditions in schools and hospitals have deteriorated in the seven years of Sandinista rule. With the **economic crisis**, there is no money to buy books or medical equipment. Even if funds were available, nothing could be bought from the United States because President Reagan has forbidden trade with Nicaragua.

The war against the Contras has **siphoned** money away from the health and education ministries...[Today] more than half the budget going to the military and less than 20 percent to health and education combined.

#### More Teachers

To be sure, more Nicaraguans are attending school. Adult education, which barely existed before the Sandinista takeover, is now widely available. The **Education Ministry** sponsors a network of night schools for adults who want to continue their education. It has also trained 16,000 **rural** community members to teach basic literacy and arithmetic in remote areas.

Almost 30,000 teachers are now working in Nicaragua, compared with 12,500 in 1978, according to official statistics. Nearly every village has a school and a teacher.

## VOCABULARY

**Contras** – group that was fighting against the Sandinistas

**Dictator Anastasio Somoza Debayle** – A dictator is someone who rules with total power over a country; Anastasio Somoza Debayle was second ruler of the Somoza regime

**Economic Crisis** – An economy is a system of how money is made and used. A country faces a financial crisis (a crisis having to do with money, for example if there is no money to buy books), they are in an economic crisis

**Education Ministry** – a governmental body that oversees education. In the United States we have a *Department of Education* instead of a *Ministry*

**Political bias** – leaning one way or another politically (in this case, parents are complaining that the schools and textbooks are pro Sandinista)

**Qualified** – officially recognized as being trained to perform a particular job

**Rural** – not urban; relating to the countryside rather than town

**Sandinista Government** – the group that overthrew the Somoza regime

**Siphon** – as a verb, siphon means to draw or channel something away from something else (in this case, to draw money away from education and give it



## Stop and Think

1. In the last Stop and Think section you answered the following question: *What impact did the fighting have on Tío Emilio's school? Why do you think some schools might have been closed for longer than others?* In the above news article you learned more about how the war impacted other schools Nicaragua. What differences do you see? Can you think of some reasons for why those differences might exist?

## Learn

*The above news article says that the Contras were backed by the United States. What does this mean?*

The history of the United States' involvement in Nicaragua can be confusing. Let's review what has happened so far and who the players are in the conflict.

Tio Emilio is born during the **Somoza** regime in 1967. In 1979, the **Sandinistas** overthrow the Somoza regime. Now the Sandinistas are in power. The Sandinistas, like many Nicaraguans, wanted a more equitable distribution of resources. For example, the article you just read talked about healthcare and education, which were two rights that under the Somoza regime were denied to many Nicaraguans. At first, the Sandinistas did increase access to some of these rights. For example, their National Literacy Campaign taught many people to read and created more schools.

However, soon the Sandinistas started to create a militarized state. You will learn more about this later, but it basically meant that armies or militaries were present in everything from schools to life on the street. The Sandinistas instated a **draft** to recruit young men to create a military. You will learn more about this later, too. Some young men didn't want to join the Sandinistas, and so some joined what were called the **Contras**, who were fighting against the Sandinista army.

So where does the United States come in? Originally, the United States was very friendly with the Somoza regime, even when they learned the Somozas were killing people. The Sandinistas were against United States presence in Nicaragua. This presented a threat to the United States, because they were using Nicaragua to make money. So the United States provided money to the Contras to fight against the Sandinistas. That is what it meant for the Contras to be backed by the United States.

To learn more about the United States' involvement in Nicaragua, see the Timeline of United States' Involvement in Nicaragua at the end of this document. To learn more about the United States' Involvement in Latin America, see "Reasons for United States Involvement in Latin America" here: <https://www.teachingforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Inside-the-Volcano.pdf>

### Part 3

“So how did you learn, Tío? How did you learn English?” I asked.

“Espera,” said Tío Emilio, “that will come. Papá worked from before dawn until dusk so us *hermanos* could go to school. Your Tíos Francisco and Raul, the oldest of us *hermanos*, stopped going to school after third grade to help Papá in the fields.”

Abuelo nodded. “They worked so you could go to school. We all worked so you could go to school.”

“Sí Papá,” Tío Emilio said turning to me, “us younger *hermanos*, we worked too, before and after school, and on weekends.”

“But what after that Tío Emilio?” I ask. “What happened when you had to buy a uniform for secondary school Abuelo? How did you pay for that?”

“We helped him and his other *hermanos* find a job,” Abuelo said, drawing circles on the ground with his cane. “He started milking cows and working as a bricklayer. He woke up at 4:30 in the morning, milked the cows, rode 10 km on horse to deliver the milk, and returned home to wash up before school started at noon. After school ended at 5 in the afternoon he returned home, ate a small dinner, and then left for his bricklaying job. He didn’t return home until well after it was dark. None of us did.”

“But if you were working so much, how did you study Tío Emilio?” I ask.

“Like Abuelo said we brought our books to the fields. But it wasn’t easy. Some days I came home and I was too tired to do any studying. I worked like this for my first four years of secondary school.”



Cows on Ometepe

## Learn

### *What is Nicaragua's education system like? How does it compare to the United States' education system?*

In some ways Nicaragua's education system is similar to that of the United States. For example, in the United States, children go to elementary school, middle school and high school. In Nicaragua, children can go to primary school (this is like elementary school), and then secondary school (this is like middle and high school).

Another way education in the United States and Nicaragua is similar is that children in both countries are required to go to school for a certain period of time. In the United States, the laws says children are required to go to school until age 16 or 18, depending on the state. In Nicaragua, the law says children are required to go to elementary school. If you don't go to school in the United States, someone would be called to come talk to your parents to make sure you get to school. In contrast, in Nicaragua this law is not strictly enforced. This means that often parents do not get in trouble for not sending their children to school.

In Nicaragua, children from families with more money are much more likely than children from families with less money to go to school. One reason for this is that many children from poorer families in Nicaragua have to stay home to work and help their parents. Because of this they often can't go to school. A second reason why children from poorer families may not go to school is that even though school is technically free, families still have to have money to buy things like books, uniforms, pencils and other schools supplies. It can be hard to pay for these supplies if your family doesn't have a lot of money. A third reason why children from poorer families may not go to school is because schools are really far away. Many families who live in rural areas, where a lot of farmwork happens, are poor. Often these are the children who already need to work in the fields to help their family. Paying for extra school supplies, and taking the time to take the 1 hour-2 hour walk to school would take time away from working to help their family.

### Nicaraguan Education System

Academic calendar: January – December

Level	Primaria (Primary School)						Secundaria (Secondary School)					
Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
Age	7-12						13-17					

### United States' Education System

Academic calendar: August/September-May/June

Level	Elementary School					Middle School			High School			
Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Age	5-11					12-14			15-18			



### Stop and Think

1. Infer and Reflect: Why do you think Tío Emilio was willing to work so hard to go to school? Do you think kids in your community have to work this hard to go to school?
2. Compare and contrast: Do you or your parents have to pay to go to school? Are there children in your community who work to be able to go to school? Did someone you know have to work so they could go to school?
3. Think: Do you think children should be allowed to work? Why or why not?

## Part 4

When I was almost done with secondary school the Sandinistas instated a draft.”

“What is a draft Tío Emilio?” I ask.

Abuelo answered. “It was because of the war. Not the same war that closed the schools, a different war. This time with Honduras. There has been fighting for a long time now in our country, Antonio. The draft meant that every man between the ages of 17-24 was required to enlist in the military for two years. Some people who had money were able to move to Costa Rica or the United States to avoid having to serve in the military. But we didn’t have that kind of money, and we didn’t know anyone in either Costa Rica or the United States.”

“So I had to leave the island to join the military,” continued Tío Emilio. “And that was the first time I left Ometepe. And let me tell you Antonio, it was horrible. The first week I cried, and cried and cried. We were so far away from home, in the mountains, cold, wet, hungry, missing family, friends, everything.”

“So what happened, Tío? You just had to stop going to school? What happened after that? How did you end up in Costa Rica? And how did you learn English?” I ask.

“I felt like I lost two years of my studies,” reflected Tío Emilio. “I thought that if I came back to Ometepe all my friends would have gone ahead of me. My *hermana* who was two years younger than me would have been in the same grade if I was to re-enroll. I was ashamed to go back. So I decided to stay on the mainland. I repeated my fourth, and completed my fifth and final year of secondary school in Managua. Managua was a big change from the island. There were buses going everywhere, it was loud, there were people shouting all the time, people got robbed. It was a scary place to be after growing up on Ometepe.”

## Learn

### *Why was there a draft? Who were the Sandinistas recruiting, and why?*

As was mentioned in the previous section, a lot of separate, but related conflicts made up the time period known as the Nicaraguan Civil War or Nicaraguan Revolution from 1979-1990. Sometimes it is hard to keep track of whom is fighting whom. This draft was instated by the Sandinistas in 1983 to recruit people for the Sandinista army, but individuals actually started to join the military in 1984. This draft was just one part of militaristic nature of the Sandinista administration. One of the slogans of the Sandinista government was “all arms to the people.” Neighborhoods were organized into brigades, and shops on the street sold AK-47 rifles and ammunition. And in school, children learned how to use guns.<sup>ii</sup>

The draft called for any men between 17-24 years of age to join the military. In the story Tío Emilio tells Antonio that some young people he knew left to Costa Rica or the United States to avoid the draft. Some people who couldn't leave the country went into hiding – but going into hiding could be really frightening, because something like not showing up for the doctors appointment you need to go through to join the military could mean you went to jail.<sup>iii</sup> Others fled to Honduras, either seeking refuge or to join the Contras, who were fighting against the Sandinista army. It wasn't necessarily that those who joined the Contras in Honduras to fight against the Sandinista wanted to fight – many of them just wanted their government to leave them alone, and thought that they would rather choose to fight with the Contras than be required to fight for the Sandinista army. For those who fled to Honduras and decided not to fight, some did so because they thought it was better being able to work (for example in factories) than hiding out in the hills back in Nicaragua. Some were also afraid of what might happen to their families if they joined the Contras, thinking that it could endanger their families<sup>iv</sup>.

## ACTIVITY

### From the Archives

Below is an edited version of a real newspaper article published on June 26, 1984, about a year after the draft started. The article discusses what life was like for young men and their families in Nicaragua after the draft. As you read, think about how the draft impacted young men's education and lives. When you are done reading, answer the questions in the Stop and Think section below.

Original source can be found here: <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1984/06/26/026565.html>

## MILITARY DRAFT IN NICARAGUA IS MEETING WIDE RESISTANCE

By STEPHEN KINZER and SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES JUNE 26, 1984

At a high school here two weeks ago, **pandemonium** erupted as word spread through classrooms that Sandinista military recruiters were in the building.

"Kids raced through the corridors and jumped over the walls," a teacher at the school... "Many of them never came back to school. They are hiding in basements somewhere."

This morning in Granada, a graceful colonial city an hour south of Managua, a dozen youths appeared for **pre-induction physical examinations**. "I thought there would be more of us," said Jorge Luis Reyes Navarro, who brought his grandmother along to **testify** that he is her sole support and should be **exempt** from the draft. "I guess the others have decided to hide out."

The military draft, which began in January, has **provoked** demonstrations and shouting matches in cities and towns throughout Nicaragua. Groups of mothers have protested that their sons are being drafted **indiscriminately**, cut off from contact with their families and sent into battle without proper training.

Interviews conducted in six Nicaraguan provinces over the last two weeks suggest that **draft evasion** is widespread. Young **fugitives** said that they were frightened the police would track them down but that they preferred life **underground** to military service.

"Three of my brothers are also hiding, and the other one is probably going to run away if they come for him," said one of the peasants, who added that he was from an impoverished family of farm laborers. "We decided we were not born to be soldiers, we have families to support." "I **deserted** along with two friends of mine because we were afraid we didn't know enough to defend ourselves in combat," the youth said quietly. "We got civilian clothes from our parents and came home by bus. I want to work, I want to study. But all that is impossible now."

School attendance has **plummeted** in many Nicaraguan high schools because of fear that recruiters will come to arrest draft resisters. In the provincial capitals of Masaya, Matagalpa, Jinotega and Granada, as well as in Managua, school administrators said they had lost as many as 40 percent of their students in recent months.

"Even among the kids who still come to class, the draft is all they think about," one school principal said. "It is the dominant fact of life for them. They don't know if they are going to have to go off and die next week." In many towns, young people said they were afraid to attend movies and other public events out of fear that policemen would ask to see their **draft cards**.

## VOCABULARY

**Exempt** – free from obligation (here, meaning that Jorge Luis Reyes Navarro should not have to join the military because he supports his grandmother)

**Deserted** – left, fled

**Draft card** – a card telling someone they have been drafted into the military

**Draft evasion** – avoiding the draft

**Fugitive** – someone hiding from authorities (people in power)

**Indiscriminately** – not discriminating against anyone, regardless of circumstance

**Pandemonium** -wild and noisy disorder, confusion, uproar

**Plummeted** – decrease significantly

**Pre-induction physical examination** – a doctors appointment someone would have to go to before joining the military

**Provoke** – to give rise to something

**Testify** – give evidence as witness in law or court

**Underground** - in this case, underground is being used to explain that someone is hiding from authorities (people in power)



### Stop and Think

1. Why was there a draft in Nicaragua during this time? Why was Tío Emilio not able to leave Nicaragua to avoid the draft?
2. Have you ever spent a long time away from home, or moved somewhere new? What do you think it would have been like to leave your community for the first time? How do you think Abuelo felt when Tío Emilio had to join the military?

## Part 5

“So what happened after that Tío Emilio? How did you end up in Costa Rica? And how did you learn English?” I ask.

“Do they not teach you patience in school, mijito?” jokes Tío Emilio.

“Tío...”

“*Dale pues,*” says Tío Emilio, laughing. “Remember how Tíos Francisco and Raul didn’t get to go to school because they had to work? Well they went to find work in Costa Rica because they pay more there. At this time I was in Nicaragua completing my bachelor’s degree. I chose a degree in hotel administration because I could receive a scholarship to pay for my studies. Funnily enough Tíos Francisco and Raul were hired to help construct a hotel, and I was lucky enough to find a job in the hotel my *hermanos* built. So, I packed up the little I had in Nicaragua, moved to Costa Rica and eventually learned English.”

The tuk-tuk of motorcycle engines sounds in the distance. Papá, the *hermanos* and the Tíos must be almost home.

“But, Antonio, that’s not the end of the story,” says Tío Emilio, drawing my attention back to our story under the Tamarind tree.

Tío Emilio smiles. “It wasn’t always easy going to school. People laughed at us. They said studying was for wimps and that coming from a family of farmers we would never do or be anything else. Mamá and Papá were farmers and I loved them. But I always wanted to show those people that it wasn’t true, to show them I could be something else. That with people who believed in me, and the opportunity to go to school, that something else was possible. I had to work in hotel administration first to get to do what I really wanted to do. Sometimes that’s how life works. You have to do something you don’t want to do to get to where you want to go.”

“And what did you want to do, Tío Emilio? What was your dream?” I ask.

“To teach English,” said Tío Emilio. “I wanted to be an English teacher.”

“Why Tío Emilio? Why did you want to be an English teacher?”

Tío Emilio thought for a moment before answering, and squeezed Abuelo’s hand. “Pura vida Antonio. I have been very fortunate in this life. And in this life I have learned it is important to do four things: to surround yourself by people who believe in you, give back to those who believed in you, believe in others, and never, ever, lose sight of your dreams.”

And that was the end of Tío Emilio’s story. As Mamá and Tía Ana helped my *hermanos* and I get ready for bed that night, I could just make out the silhouettes of Abuelo, Papá, and Tíos Emilio, Diego, Pablo and Bernardo sitting under the Tamarind tree. It was faint, but I could hear them singing along to one of Tío Emilio’s favorite Beatles songs:

*There’s nothing you can do that can’t be done*

*Nothing you can sing that can’t be sung*

*Nothing you can say, but you can learn how to play the game*

*Nothing you can make that can’t be made*

*No one you can save that can't be saved*

*Nothing you can do, but you can learn how to be you in time*

*It's easy*

*All you need is love*

*All you need is love*

*All you need is love, love*

*Love is all you need*

## Stop and Think

Nicaragua is a beautiful country with lakes, volcanoes, waterfalls, and forests. It is home to many happy and generous people. But many are also very poor. You might wonder: Why are so many people in Nicaragua poor? Depending on who you ask, you will probably get different answers.

It is difficult to identify one reason why people in Nicaragua might be poor. Some might say it is because of the government, some might say it is because the country doesn't have a strong economy (or a lot of money to spend on its citizens), some might say it is because different countries have different resources at their disposal (for example, minerals that can be sold, such as gold, copper or silver), or even because of war. Maybe one of these answers is true, or maybe all of these answers are true. If the answer to the problem of poverty was simple, hopefully we would have fixed it by now!

In our story, Tío Emilio's and his *hermanos'* opportunities for education are shaped by how much money their family has. We see that the whole family works very hard so Tío Emilio's and his *hermanos* can go to school.

1. Infer and reflect: Why do you think people laughed at Tío Emilio when they studied? Have you ever been laughed at for something? How did you respond?
2. Recall and Connect: What was Tío Emilio's dream? Why did he have to pursue a degree in hotel administration before he could do what he wanted to do?
3. Hypothesize: Tío Emilio's *hermanos* go to find work in Costa Rica because they pay more than in Nicaragua. Why do you think they pay more in Costa Rica than Nicaragua?
4. Reflect: Do you think that all children should get to go to school? Why or why not?
5. Reflect: Drawing on what you have learned about the United States' involvement in Nicaragua, can you think of any other reasons Nicaragua might be poor?

## Closing Reflection

1. Reflect: Re-read your first Stop and Think reflection. How, if at all, have your ideas about Nicaragua changed? If they changed, what made you change your mind? If your ideas about Nicaragua did not change, why did they not change?

I used to think	Now I think

2. Think: What is one thing you would like someone else to know about what you have learned? Answer in 3-5 sentences.

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# TIMELINE OF THE UNITED STATES' INVOLVEMENT IN NICARAGUA

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\*\*Adapted from timelines in [Zinn Education Project Curriculum](#), [Stanford's Nicaragua Timeline](#), [iExplore](#) and [Lonely Planet's Nicaragua Timeline](#).

6000 BC

Long before Tio Emilio was born, indigenous groups construct burial sites from clam shells on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast

450 BC

Nicaraguans begin to trade with the areas that are today known as Columbia and the United States

AD 800

Indigenous communities make many petroglyphs (rock carvings) throughout the country

1524

Part of Nicaragua is colonized by Spaniards including Hernández de Córdoba. Indigenous communities try to drive the Spaniards out of their land because they are being oppressed and the Spaniards took their land without cause. However, many of the indigenous community members are taken as slaves by the Spaniards, and many die from germs they have not been exposed to before.

1665

Great Britain colonizes the Caribbean coast to use it as a military post, and for trade. Note that Nicaragua was colonized by both Great Britain and Spain.

1821

Nicaragua gains its independence from Spain.

1850

Great Britain and the United States sign a treaty (an agreement) saying that they use a trade route through Nicaragua to trade. They do not ask Nicaragua if this is okay.

1856

An American named William Walker decides he wants to take control of several countries in Latin America. William Walker decides he is the president of Nicaragua. The people in Nicaragua are not asked for permission (there is no election), but the United States' president, Franklin Pierce, says William Walker is the president of Nicaragua. William Walker says slavery is permitted in Nicaragua.

1870

Nicaraguans protest United States intervention in their country.

1893

José Santos Zelaya becomes the president of Nicaragua. While he is president, he sends military expeditions into Honduras and El Salvador causing conflict. He also clashes with American companies working in Nicaragua because against United States economic domination of Nicaragua.<sup>vi</sup>

One particular tension was about building the Panama Canal. President Roosevelt wanted to build a canal in Panama, but President Zelaya wanted to build it in Nicaragua. Whomever could control the canal would have a lot of control of any trade that wanted to pass from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans. Once work on the Panama canal started, President Roosevelt created something called the “Roosevelt Corollary” which said that the United States had the right to intervene in any country in the Western Hemisphere if it thought intervention was necessary.

1910

The United States is unhappy about president Zelaya’s opposition to United States economic domination of Nicaragua. Now William Howard Taft is president in the United States. Philander Knox, who Taft’s secretary of state, starts a campaign in the United States so people won’t like Zelaya. Knox sent diplomats (people who represented the United States) who he knew didn’t like Zelaya to Nicaragua. When these diplomats arrived in Nicaragua, they sent back reports to newspapers in the United States that made Zelaya look really bad. The reports called Zelaya things like a “menace” (a person likely to cause harm, a threat or danger). American businessman in Nicaragua formed a secret plan for one of their buddies, General Juan Jose Estrada to become president. Again, without consulting the Nicaraguan people, General Juan Jose Estrada decides he is the president of Nicaragua. Estrada received a lot of money from American companies. Estrada used the money to pay for weapons to build a militia. Zelaya was no longer in power, but he wasn’t gone either. He still had followers, troops, who he sent to fight Estrada’s militia.

Meanwhile, Knox, back in Washington, saw that what he originally wanted had happened – Zelaya was no longer president. But it didn’t seem like it would belong before Zelaya’s fighters might conquer Estrada. In other words, Knox realized that if he didn’t do something, his plan might fail. Knox asked Guatemala, El Salvador, and Costa Rica to send armies to Nicaragua to overthrow Zelaya, but they all said no. Knox decided to write the Nicaraguan minister in Washington a letter demanding Zelaya’s government be replaced. Knox argued that Zelaya was creating intolerable conditions in Nicaragua. In reality, though, Knox himself had created the intolerable conditions by making people dislike Zelaya, and afterwards supporting fighting in the country. But he didn’t mention this in the letter, because that would have undermined his reasoning.

In the end, Zelaya had to resign, and General Estrada remained in power. Knox got his wish after all: the United States put someone in power who would support continued United States presence in Nicaragua, and who would allow the United States to economically dominate the country. In other words, the United States could use Nicaragua to make money. This sequence of events was known as the “overthrow” of Zelaya, and is considered the first of many times the United States government has planned the overthrow of a leader in another country.

But this was far from the end of United States’ intervention in Nicaragua. For the purposes of this story we are going to fast forward to 1933 when the Somoza regime begins. You can learn more about the time between 1910 and 1936 and beyond in the “The United States in Nicaragua: Timeline” here:

<https://www.teachingforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Inside-the-Volcano.pdf>.

1936

Anastasio Somoza Garcia forces the preceding president from office through an election. The word “forced” is used because there were a number of problems with the election that made people question whether or not it was really democratic. For example, the United States Minister reported that Somoza was murdering his opponents but was friendly to investors from the United States. Throughout his rule, Somoza and the United States maintain friendly relations, even though the United State government recognizes that Somoza seems to have a “thirst for money and a considerable love of power.”

1956

President Anastasio Somoza Garcia is assassinated, and his son, Luis Somoza, takes over.

1967

Luis Somoza’s brother takes over as president.

**[In our story, this is when Tio Emilio’s is born.]**

1969

By this time, businesses have invested a lot of money in Nicaragua. United States businesses have invested in food processing, fisheries, tobacco, textiles, chemicals and pesticides, forest products, packaging, steel rolling and fabrication, oil refining, household goods and ceramics, as well as tourism and banking.

1976-1977

Opposition grows against Somoza. Somoza continues to deny access to resources like education and healthcare. Civilians are killed through mass executions. Some people are tortured. During this time many people are poor: half of Nicaraguans live on an average of \$286 per person.

1977

The Sandinistas begin coordinated attacks in different regions of the country. The Sandinistas begin talking about wanting to overthrow the Somoza regime.

1978

People around Nicaragua continue to protest the Somoza regime. But Somoza doesn’t change much. Somoza’s government kills more people.

1979

The United States supports a loan to Somoza from an international organization. In other words, the United States thinks Somoza should still be receiving money and should still be in power. Sandinista groups around the country continue to revolt. Eventually Somoza resigns and Sandinista fighters take over.

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# FURTHER EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES ABOUT NICARAGUA:

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## **Zinn Project Inside the Volcano Curriculum about Nicaragua**

[https://www.zinnedproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Inside\\_the\\_Volcano\\_full.pdf](https://www.zinnedproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Inside_the_Volcano_full.pdf)

## **Teaching for Change's Teaching Central America Website**

<https://www.teachingcentralamerica.org/>

## **Storycorps Interview With Alfonso Campos Who Grew Up in Nicaragua at the same time as Tío Emilio**

<https://archive.storycorps.org/interviews/history-interview-103/>

\*\*Note: discusses war and shooting

### Ideas:

- Compare and contrast Alfonso Campos's experience with Tío Emilio's experience.
- Both Alfonso Campos and Tío Emilio leave Nicaragua. How do you think their lives were different after they left?

## **For Information About the Contra Affairs**

[https://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding\\_the\\_Iran\\_Contra\\_Affair/timeline-nicaragua.php](https://www.brown.edu/Research/Understanding_the_Iran_Contra_Affair/timeline-nicaragua.php)

## **Timeline of Nicaragua, By Stanford**

[https://web.stanford.edu/group/arts/nicaragua/discovery\\_eng/timeline/](https://web.stanford.edu/group/arts/nicaragua/discovery_eng/timeline/)

## **For Information About the United States Overthrow of Zelaya**

<https://libcom.org/history/us-orchestrated-overthrow-nicaraguan-government-1910>

## **For Further Resources Related to Teaching About Nicaragua**

<https://www.seedsoflearning.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Nicaragua-Resource-Guide.pdf>

**For Teaching Ideas About Censorship Related to the Connecting to Current Events Activity**

Project Censored: <https://www.projectcensored.org/censorship/teachers-guide/>

Connect the discussion to something kids might be familiar too, such as Banned Books Week:  
<https://bannedbooksweek.org/>

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# ACTIVITIES

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## How might conflict impact people differently depending on their age?

**Read:** In 1983, the Nicaraguan government instated a draft. This meant that every man between the ages of 17-24 was required to enlist in the military for two years. The following table shows the ages of each of Tío Emilio's siblings at the time of the draft.

**Do:**

- Identify: Who had to stop their education because of the draft? Who did not? Why?
- Connect: How did the draft impact Tío Emilio's path through education?
- Infer: Does violence and war impact everyone equally? Why or why not?

Sibling in Tío Emilio's Family	Age in 1983	Stage in school	Impact on education
Tío Francisco	27	Out of school since second grade	None
Tío Raul	25	Out of school since second grade	None
Tío Pablo	22	Out of school, working	None
Tío Bernardo	19	Just finished	None
Tío Emilio	17	Enrolled in second to last year of secondary school	Has to stop schooling to serve in the military.
Tía Ana	15	Enrolled in second year of secondary school	None - woman
Papá (Manuel)	12	Enrolled in primary school	Will need to serve in military
Tío Diego	11	Enrolled in primary school	Will need to serve in military

## Central American Geography



Source: <http://www.estarte.me/blank-map-of-central-america.html/blank-map-of-central-america-and-caribbean-islands>

## Draw Tío Emilio's Journey from Costa Rica to Nicaragua

In the story we learn that it takes Emilio 12 hours to get from Costa Rica to Nicaragua. First he takes a bus from Juntas to the highway, then a bus from the highway to Liberia, and then a bus from Liberia to Peñas Blancas, which is what they call the border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. From the Peñas Blancas takes a taxi to the port of San Jorge, where he hops on a ferry to the port of Moyogalpa, here on Ometepe.

Can you label the following places on the map on the next page?

- Juntas, Costa Rica
- Liberia, Costa Rica
- Peñas Blancas, Nicaragua
- Port of San Jorge, Nicaragua
- Moyogalpa, Nicaragua
- Isla Ometepe



# Political Bias

## Part 1

Recall in the second From the Archives newspaper article, titled *Casualties in Nicaragua: Schools and Healthcare*, some parents complained that “that their children [were] being educated with **political bias**.” We defined political bias as “leaning one way or another politically (in this case, parents are complaining that the schools and textbooks are pro Sandinista).”

Is it possible to avoid being biased? Answer in 3-5 sentences. Your answer may contain questions.

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## Part 2

The parents complained that the schools and textbooks were “pro Sandinista” – in other words, that the text books were politically biased towards the Sandinistas.

The following excerpts have been taken from the text. What part of the “telling of what happened” might be biased? Answer in 3-5 sentences. Your answers may contain questions.

### **Example:**

#### Excerpt from Text:

*“The Somozas were also known to do wasteful and selfish things with government money. For example, after an earthquake that devastated much of the country’s buildings in the capital city and elsewhere in 1972, President Somoza Debayle used some of the relief aid provided to the country for himself.”*

#### Answer:

My guess is that the President Somoza Debayle wouldn’t say what he was doing was selfish. Usually when we do something for ourselves we don’t think of ourselves as being selfish. If he were writing this, he might have said that he was using the money so that he could have enough money to be happy and healthy so he could do his job.

**Your turn!**

Excerpt from the text:

*“After a while many people in Nicaragua grew tired of these leaders. They wanted access to healthcare and education. They wanted change. In some governments you can vote when you want change. However, the people of Nicaragua saw that the Somozas would rather keep money for themselves rather than provide access to healthcare and education. Because of this, many people in Nicaragua believed a revolution was the only way to get this change. It was not that the people of Nicaragua wanted a war, but they realized that maybe a war was the only means for change.”*

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Excerpt from the text:

*“Originally, the United States was very friendly with the Somoza regime, even when they learned the Somozas were killing people. The Sandinistas were against United States presence in Nicaragua. This presented a threat to the United States, because they were using Nicaragua to make money. So the United States provided money to the Contras to fight against the Sandinistas. That is what it meant for the Contras to be backed by the United States.”*

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How and in what other ways do you think this resource might be biased? Why? Find two examples in the text to use as evidence.

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## Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World Handout

Complete Facing History and Ourselves Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to World Handout using Tío Emilio 's story

[https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/TexttoText\\_handout\\_v.final\\_.pdf](https://www.facinghistory.org/sites/default/files/TexttoText_handout_v.final_.pdf)

## Connecting to Current Events

- Let's look back at the From the Archives sections you completed above. What was the name of the newspapers? Where were these newspapers published?

Name of newspapers: \_\_\_\_\_

Where the newspapers were published: \_\_\_\_\_

- If the story had been written by someone in Nicaragua, how do you think the story might have been different? Provide two examples.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- It was hard for the author of this story to find old newspapers from Nicaragua. To the right you will see the front page of a Nicaraguan newspaper article published on April 1, 2019. The headline reads: "we are running out of ink, but not news." The current leader of Nicaragua has been withholding printing press materials (such as ink) from the press for more than eight months. This is why everything looks pink.

Why do you think the government doesn't want the people who write the news to have ink?

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# TÍO EMILIO'S STORY

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My name is Antonio. I live on an island that was created by a volcano, millions of years ago.

We call the island Ometepe, and it sits in the largest lake in the world. There are two volcanoes on the island, and sometimes one of the volcanoes still coughs big clouds of ash into the air. When this happens they have to close the schools.

I live with my three *hermanos*, Mamá, Papá and Abuelo. My *hermanos* and I like to go swimming in the lake around Ometepe. Sometimes we play tag in the shallow water. The monkeys by our house play tag in the trees, too. Sometimes I think they can understand us, but Pablo, my older brother says they can't. Pablo is in secondary school. He thinks he knows everything.

Today, my Tío Emilio, one of my Papá's *hermanos* is coming to visit. Tío Emilio works in Costa Rica. I have never left Ometepe, and Costa Rica seems really far away. It takes Emilio 12 hours to get here. First he takes three buses from Juntas to Peñas Blancas, which is what they call the border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. From there he takes a taxi to the port of San Jorge, where he hops on a ferry to the port of Moyogalpa, here on Ometepe. My *hermano* meets Tío Emilio with the motorcycle at the port.

Sometimes we're allowed to go with Pablo to pick up Tío Emilio, but most of the time we just run down our dirt road when we hear the rumble of the engine. When we get close, Pablo slows down the motorcycle, and Tío Emilio says "you can't catch me!" And races us home.

Tío Emilio helps with lots of things when he comes home. But my favorite part of Tío Emilio coming home are his stories. Sometimes they are about far away lands where *chocoyos* and monkeys tango to the rhythm of the waves. Sometimes they are about the Nicaraguan *cafetaleros* where he works in Costa Rica. I wonder what type of story he will bring with him today.



View from the ferry

It is midday, and we don't want to be anywhere but the shade. We settle down where we always do for Tío Emilio's stories, under the Tamarind tree. The monkeys sit still in the tree above us, as if they are coming to listen, too. Tío Emilio swings his chair around so he can fold his arms across the back of the chair. Abuelo sits as he always does, hands on his cane, looking out across the lake. Abuelo doesn't talk much. Most of what I have learned about him has come from Papá and his *hermanos*. I never knew my Abuela, either, but she isn't mentioned much. She passed away before I was born.

My *hermanos* and I, we are four boys total. Today my older *hermanos*, Papá and the Tíos are helping fix a friend's fence, so they will be back a little later. Mamá is off with the *esposas* of Tíos Diego, Pablo and Bernardo. They are cooking dinner at Tía Ana's house and will bring it over later.

So for now, it's just me, *Abuelo* and the monkeys, waiting for Tío Emilio's story.



Volcán Concepción

“A long, long time ago, more than five of your lifetimes,” Tío Emilio begins, his big brown eyes reflecting the triangle shape of Volcán Concepción in the distance, “I was a little boy just like you. We lived on the other side of the island - all eight of us *hermanos*, Mamá and Papá. We too splashed around in the warm water, and watched the *monos* dance in the trees and the *guardabarranco* flash his bright blue tail.

And just like you, Antonio, us Tíos, we listened to music. “Do you remember that Papá? How we listened to music?” Tío Emilio asked Abuelo.

Abuelo nodded. I was surprised when he responded, his voice quiet but steady. “*Claro*, Emilio. That old radio introduced you to the sounds of faraway places, to a world beyond Ometepe.”

Tío Emilio laughed, “Yes it did. Through our radio we listened to the ‘gimme, gimme, gimme’ of ABBA, to the “oh-oh-oh” of Laura Branigan - remember that Papá? And the “all you need is love, love...love is all you need” - the Beatles, remember Papá? Remember that?” Abuelo nodded, but didn’t say anything more.

“One day as I sang along,” Tío Emilio continued, turning towards me, “your Tío Francisco told me, ‘silly brother, you will never know what they are saying.’ ‘Maybe my *hermano* was right,’ I thought, ‘how will I ever know those words? School is already so far away and we can barely pay for my books and supplies. How could I ask for more?’ Because Papá worked so hard for us, and wanted us to go to school. Right Papá?” Tío Emilio asked Abuelo. “You and Mamá always told us, ‘study so you do not grow up to work with a machete. Study so you will not be out working all day in the sun.’”

“Sí, and Mamá and I made sure you brought your books with you when we worked in the fields,” said Abuelo. “That was important when the schools closed because of the fighting on the mainland so you wouldn’t fall behind.”

“But why were the schools closed, Tío? Who was fighting?” I asked.

“Because of the war, Antonio. It was the start of the revolution. The fighting never reached the island, but there were teachers who didn’t come from the mainland because they were scared. It was hard to know where the fighting was happening. It wasn’t always in one place. You never knew when it might reach where you lived. My school was only closed for about half a year. But I would imagine some schools that were closer to the violence were closed for longer. But so I told myself no, Antonio, my *hermano* is not right. I told myself, ‘One day I will know the words. One day I will make Mamá and Papá proud.’”

“But how did you learn Tío? How did you learn English?” I asked, looking first to Tío Emilio, and then to Abuelo. “And why were people fighting?”

It was Abuelo who answered. “People fight for all kinds of reasons, Antonio. For many years Nicaragua had been peaceful. But there came a time when those in power, the Somoza regime, only cared about themselves and their friends. Many people could not go to school or get help if they were sick. And people were very poor. Eventually people decided enough was enough, and a group called the Sandinistas overthrew the people who had been in power. That was the start of the revolution.”

“So how did you learn, Tío? How did you learn English?” I asked.

“Espera,” said Tío Emilio, “that will come. Papá worked from before dawn until dusk so us *hermanos* could go to school. Your Tíos Francisco and Raul, the oldest of us *hermanos*, stopped going to school after third grade to help Papá in the fields.”

Abuelo nodded. “They worked so you could go to school. We all worked so you could go to school.”

“Sí Papá,” Tío Emilio said turning to me, “us younger *hermanos*, we worked too, before and after school, and on weekends.”

“But what after that Tío Emilio?” I ask. “What happened when you had to buy a uniform for secondary school Abuelo? How did you pay for that?”

“We helped him and his other *hermanos* find a job,” Abuelo said, drawing circles on the ground with his cane. “He started milking cows and working as a bricklayer. He woke up at 4:30 in the morning, milked the cows, rode 10 km on horse to deliver the milk, and returned home to wash up before school started at noon. After school ended at 5 in the afternoon he returned home, ate a small dinner, and then left for his bricklaying job. He didn’t return home until well after it was dark. None of us did.”

“But if you were working so much, how did you study Tío Emilio?” I ask.

“Like Abuelo said we brought our books to the fields. But it wasn’t easy. Some days I came home and I was too tired to do any studying. I worked like this for my first four years of secondary school.”



Cows on Ometepe

When I was almost done with secondary school the Sandinistas instated a draft.”

“What is a draft Tío Emilio?” I ask.

Abuelo answered. “It was because of the war. Not the same war that closed the schools, a different war. This time with Honduras. There has been fighting for a long time now in our country, Antonio. The draft meant that every man between the ages of 17-24 was required to enlist in the military for two years. Some people who had money were able to move to Costa Rica or the United States to avoid having to serve in the military. But we didn’t have that kind of money, and we didn’t know anyone in either Costa Rica or the United States.”

“So I had to leave the island to join the military,” continued Tío Emilio. “And that was the first time I left Ometepe. And let me tell you Antonio, it was horrible. The first week I cried, and cried and cried. We were so far away from home, in the mountains, cold, wet, hungry, missing family, friends, everything.”

“So what happened, Tío? You just had to stop going to school? What happened after that? How did you end up in Costa Rica? And how did you learn English?” I ask.

“I felt like I lost two years of my studies,” reflected Tío Emilio. “I thought that if I came back to Ometepe all my friends would have gone ahead of me. My *hermana* who was two years younger than me would have been in the same grade if I was to re-enroll. I was ashamed to go back. So I decided to stay on the mainland. I repeated my fourth, and completed my fifth and final year of secondary school in Managua. Managua was a big change from the island. There were buses going everywhere, it was loud, there were people shouting all the time, people got robbed. It was a scary place to be after growing up on Ometepe.”

“So what happened after that Tío Emilio? How did you end up in Costa Rica? And how did you learn English?” I ask.

“Do they not teach you patience in school, mijito?” jokes Tío Emilio.

“Tío...”

“*Dale pues,*” says Tío Emilio, laughing. “Remember how Tíos Francisco and Raul didn’t get to go to school because they had to work? Well they went to find work in Costa Rica because they pay more there. At this time I was in Nicaragua completing my bachelor’s degree. I chose a degree in hotel administration because I could receive a scholarship to pay for my studies. Funnily enough Tíos Francisco and Raul were hired to help construct a hotel, and I was lucky enough to find a job in the hotel my *hermanos* built. So, I packed up the little I had in Nicaragua, moved to Costa Rica and eventually learned English.”

The tuk-tuk of motorcycle engines sounds in the distance. Papá, the *hermanos* and the Tíos must be almost home.

“But, Antonio, that’s not the end of the story,” says Tío Emilio, drawing my attention back to our story under the Tamarind tree.

Tío Emilio smiles. “It wasn’t always easy going to school. People laughed at us. They said studying was for wimps and that coming from a family of farmers we would never do or be anything else. Mamá and Papá were farmers and I loved them. But I always wanted to show those people that it wasn’t true, to show them I could be something else. That with people who believed in me, and the opportunity to go to school, that something else was possible. I had to work in hotel administration first to get to do what I really wanted to do. Sometimes that’s how life works. You have to do something you don’t want to do to get to where you want to go.”

“And what did you want to do, Tío Emilio? What was your dream?” I ask.

“To teach English,” said Tío Emilio. “I wanted to be an English teacher.”

“Why Tío Emilio? Why did you want to be an English teacher?”

Tío Emilio thought for a moment before answering, and squeezed Abuelo’s hand. “Pura vida Antonio. I have been very fortunate in this life. And in this life I have learned it is important to do four things: to surround yourself by people who believe in you, give back to those who believed in you, believe in others, and never, ever, lose sight of your dreams.”

And that was the end of Tío Emilio’s story. As Mamá and Tía Ana helped my *hermanos* and I get ready for bed that night, I could just make out the silhouettes of Abuelo, Papá, and Tíos Emilio, Diego, Pablo and Bernardo sitting under the Tamarind tree. It was faint, but I could hear them singing along to one of Tío Emilio’s favorite Beatles songs:

*There’s nothing you can do that can’t be done*

*Nothing you can sing that can’t be sung*

*Nothing you can say, but you can learn how to play the game*

*Nothing you can make that can’t be made*

*No one you can save that can’t be saved*

*Nothing you can do, but you can learn how to be you in time*

*It’s easy*

*All you need is love*

*All you need is love*

*All you need is love, love*

*Love is all you need*

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> The article has been shortened for educational purposes, and some words have been changed to improve comprehension. The original article can be accessed by the link provided.

<sup>ii</sup> Williams, D. (1985, April 21). *The Los Angeles Times*. Nicaragua Draft Taking Firm Hold : Conscripted Used to Instill Ideology, Official Concedes. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-04-21-mn-13184-story.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> Williams, D. (1985, February 18). *The Los Angeles Times*. Many Find Refuge in Honduras : Nicaraguans Flee Draft; Some Join Contra Ranks. Retrieved April 14, 2019, from <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1985-02-18-mn-3108-story.html>

<sup>v</sup> The article has been shortened for educational purposes, and some words have been changed to improve comprehension. The original article can be accessed by the link provided.

<sup>vi</sup> Anonymous. (2016, December 14). The US-orchestrated overthrow of the Nicaraguan government, 1910. Retrieved April 14, 2019, from <https://libcom.org/history/us-orchestrated-overthrow-nicaraguan-government-1910>