

SDSU CENTER FOR COMICS STUDIES

The Sketchbook

for Teaching Comics and Social Justice

LESSON PLAN FOR:

La Lucha: The Story of
Lucha Castro and
Human Rights in Mexico



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Why This Comic for Social Justice?



La Lucha: The Story of Lucha Castro and Human Rights in Mexico

This graphic novel presents a collection of vignettes that delve into the real-life narratives of women human rights defenders (WHRDs). This crucial story explores the history of cartel dominance, systemic corruption, and the urgent need for social justice in the Mexican border state of Chihuahua. Since 1993, an estimated 900 individuals, predominantly women, have tragically fallen victim to the unrelenting violence in Juárez, a politically charged environment under local cartel control.

Interwoven throughout the narrative is the remarkable story of Lucha Castro, a prominent Mexican WHRD, who offers profound insight into complexities and challenges faced by those who are fighting back while underscoring the vital significance of their work. The abuse of women ultimately undermines the entire community as the impact of it forces a change in their familial roles.

- Highlights regionally specific human rights violations
- Introduces the concept of 'femicide'
- Brings awareness to crimes against women
- Discusses the work of Front Line Defenders

The accounts of those who assisted Castro and her fellow WHRDs are harrowing and also serve as a beacon of hope: highlighting the potential for transformative change when the struggles of marginalized communities, and women in particular, are addressed. The book also illustrates the immense personal sacrifices and dangers endured by those who dare to stand against injustice. The text does not include an express call to action - instead, it arms readers with a greater awareness of the scope of the human rights struggles, resources for change, and admiration for front line defenders.

“Chronicles the extraordinary acts of advocacy carried out by ordinary citizens who transformed their grief into resilience and active resistance.”



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About the Comic



Among the violence-ridden Mexican borderlands, the state of Juárez, Chihuahua has gained particular notoriety. With drug cartel clashes and deep seeded official corruption, Chihuahua surpasses war-torn Afghanistan in annual murder rates. Shockingly, 97% of the homicides in Juárez remain unsolved due to a pervasive culture of impunity. Despite the intentionally crafted and pervasive state of fear, a courageous group of human rights activists, led by the brazen attorney Lucha Castro, who works tirelessly to expose the perpetrators and complicit officials.

Stories of families torn apart by disappearances, homicides, and high instances of gender-based violence are laid bare. The graphic novel chronicles the extraordinary acts of advocacy carried out by ordinary citizens who transformed their grief into resilience and active resistance. Black and white illustrations beautifully capture the chilling reality faced by these individuals and their unwavering determination to seek justice in the real world where everything is tinged with gray.

“Over time I realized that I am a human rights defender and this is where I feel most comfortable in my skin. It is a life project, a way of living, of being in this world. To the coming generations, I want to say that it is worth spending your lives working for human rights. All human beings can decide. That's all we have; we can decide how we want to spend our lives.” Lucha Castro, November 2015.

“A front-line human rights defender fighting murderous impunity in the Mexican borderlands.”



Photo: Lucha Castro speaks with PBI Mexico staff during event in Chihuahua © PBI Mexico



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About the Creator



Artist and writer of *La Lucha*, Jon Sack is an activist based in both the United States and the United Kingdom. In 2006, he successfully earned his MFA degree from Goldsmiths College. His artwork has been showcased in exhibitions across the US and UK. Notably, Jon has also contributed his creative prowess to the world of comics, shedding light on significant subjects such as the history of oil in Iraq, the blockade of Gaza, and the challenges faced by Syrian refugees in Turkey. His comics have been featured in prominent publications around the world, including the *Daily Star* (Lebanon), the *Mail and Guardian* (South Africa), *Red Pepper Magazine* (UK), and the *Book Beyond Borders*. Jon Sack demonstrates a commitment to using his craft as a powerful tool for social commentary and awareness.

La Lucha's editor, Adam Shapiro, is an advocate for justice, freedom, and accountability. His commitment to human rights is demonstrated through his work in various organizations, engagement in solidarity activism, documentary film-making, and global campaigning. With firsthand experience in conflict regions, Adam has successfully implemented projects worldwide. Adam served as the Head of Communications & Visibility at Front Line Defenders, an international human rights organization based in Ireland. He also has contributed to Global Rights in Afghanistan and played a pivotal role in Avaaz, providing initial support to activists in the Middle East during the uprisings in 2011. Adam co-founded the International Solidarity Movement and was an organizer with the Free Gaza Movement. He holds multiple degrees, including an MA in Politics from NYU, an MA in Arab Studies from Georgetown University, and a BA from Washington University in St. Louis. Adam is fluent in Arabic and Spanish, furthering his ability to make an impact within diverse populations. His expertise and involvement have earned him frequent appearances in international media as a commentator on global affairs and as a representative for various organizations.

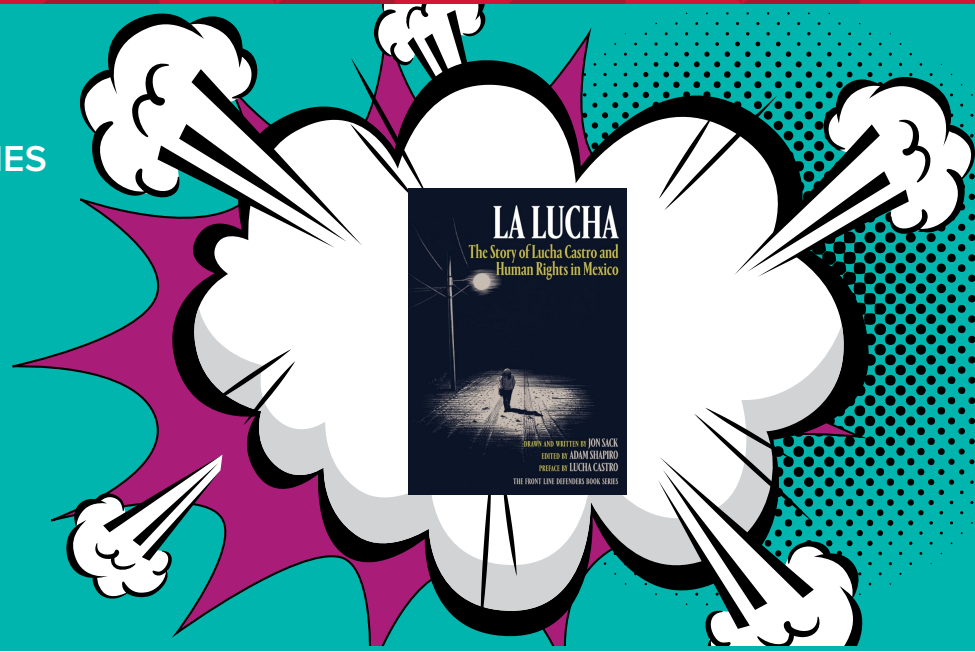
“Through his artistic endeavors, *La Lucha* writer and illustrator Jon Sack demonstrates a commitment to using his craft as a powerful tool for social commentary and awareness.”



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Discussion Questions



GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the significance, if any, of the stories being named after the women they're about? What does it say about the subject matter?
- 2) On the final page of "Alma," she states "We are in the midst of a war, which is a war but isn't..." (Sack, 2015, Alma section, panel three) *see below. Elaborate on this quote and how it relates to the overarching themes.



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Discussion Questions



GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *cont.*

3) Norma says “...so there is no justice but there is truth” (Sack, 2015, Norma section, panel two). --Why has truth become so important in a situation where real justice, such as bringing back a murdered loved one, is impossible? Does truth remain important in the face of a potentially violent death? How so?



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Discussion Questions



GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *cont.*

- 4) There are several examples of mothers who “give up” their families in pursuit of something resembling justice. What type of cause or circumstance, if any, would make the sacrifice of time with family worthwhile to you? Give examples and defend your answer.
- 5) In your opinion, does the police-state scenario in Juarez, as described by Emilia, create a safer or less safe environment? In what ways could it both improve and decrease the quality of citizen life?
- 6) Which of the women’s stories stuck out most to you? Explain your answer.
- 7) Why do you think the illustrations are in black and white? Is it a commentary of some kind, does it complement the story, or is it simply an artistic choice unrelated to the story?
- 8) Does the graphic novel format of *La Lucha* enhance your understanding of the stories? In your opinion, how does the format compare to watching the same stories in a documentary, or reading about them in a traditional non-illustrated text?
- 9) How does the graphic novel format of *La Lucha* enhance your understanding of the stories?
- 10) How does femicide and violence against women: “maintain unequal power relations, perpetuate privilege, prevent or discourage the political participation of more than half of humanity?” What role does destabilizing females have in controlling communities?



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Activities and Assignments



ACTIVITIES / ASSIGNMENTS:

Activity #1 - Think of a parallel to another country facing systems of oppression. Compare and contrast them based on the following: Land rights and availability, infrastructure, economic prosperity, and basic human needs/rights. Cite at least two sources for your comparison.

Activity #2 - Create your own political action plan. For the purposes of this activity, remove the fear of real world consequences and focus on the following:

- Defining the problem
- Measurable goal(s) for solving or relieving some aspect of it
- 3-5 actionable steps towards the goal(s)
- Summary of impact and outcome
- Be prepared to share

Activity #3 - Spend ten to fifteen minutes free-writing, immediately after finishing *La Lucha*. Record your overall impressions of the graphic novel, including the artwork, and answering the following questions:

- Which story stuck out to you the most? Why?
- What are your overall takeaways?
- Did this graphic novel inspire you in some way? Explain your answer.



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Further Reading



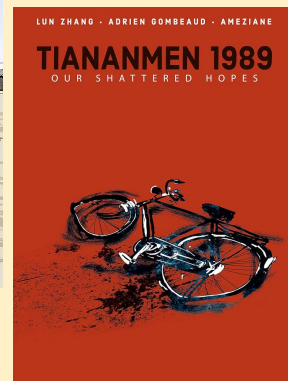
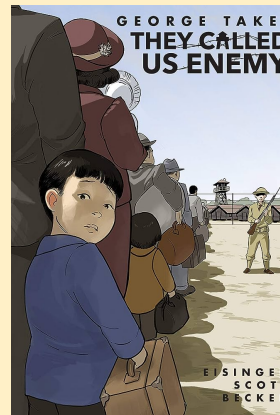
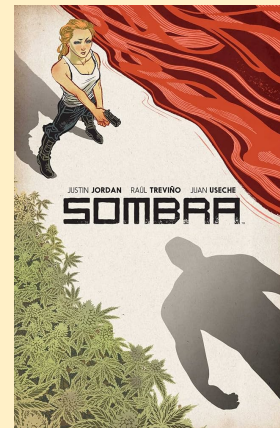
"Read Alikes" - Similar or Related Graphic Novels:

Jordan, Justin, writer. *Sombra* . Art by Raúl Treviño. Los Angeles: BOOM! Studios, 2017.

Lewis, John, Andrew, Aydin, writers. *March* . Art by Nate Powell. Marietta: Top Shelf Productions, 2013.

Takei, George, Eisinger, Justin, Scott, Steven. *They Called Us Enemy* . Art by Harmony Becker. San Diego: IDW Publishing, 2019.

Zhang, Lun, writer. *Tiananmen 1989: Our Shattered Hopes* . Art by Ameziane. San Diego: IDW Publishing, 2020.



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Further Reading



Additional Resources (articles, websites, author interviews):

“Cypher Comics.” Front Line Defenders, July 2020.
www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/resource-publication/cypher-comics

“La Lucha.” C-SPAN BookTV, 29 March 2015.
www.c-span.org/video/?326381-1/la-lucha#

Nistal, Susana. “Interview with Lucha Castro from the Centre for the Human Rights of Women (CEDEHM).” PBI Mexico, 11 November 2015.
www.pbi-mexico.org/news/2015-11-03/interview-lucha-castro-centre-human-rights-women-cedehm

O’Neil, Shannon K. “Human Rights Abuses in Mexico’s Drug War.” Council on Foreign Relations, 15 November 2011.
www.cfr.org/blog/human-rights-abuses-mexicos-drug-war

“Press.” Jon Sack author website, 11 May 2023. www.jonsack.com/press

The Three Deaths of Marisela Escobedo. Directed by Carlos Perez Osorio, Pimienta Films, 2020. Netflix. www.netflix.com/title/81002192.

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About the Educator



Moni Barrette is a career public librarian who expanded her expertise in libraries, comics, and relationship building through her role at Comics Plus for LibraryPass as the Director of Content Management and Publisher Relations.

As co-founder of the nonprofit Creators Assemble, President of the American Library Association's Graphic Novel & Comics Round Table, and adjunct lecturer at SDSU, she is dedicated to promoting learning through the use of comics and popular culture.

A 2023 Eisner Awards judge, Moni frequently attends comic conventions, hosts industry networking events, and helps librarians and educators implement comics and tabletop role playing games into their learning spaces.

In her spare time, Moni loves hanging out with her husband, daughters, and poorly mannered rescue dogs. She can often also be found hunting for ghosts in creepy old buildings.

The Center for Comics Studies, drawing on support from the SDSU President's Big Idea program, commissioned this Sketchbook at the suggestion of the [Graphix Project](#).



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*Formatted and Edited by Jenifer M. Glor, SDSU MA Student (History)