

Colombia: Sofia Survives the Border | Lesson Plan

How would securing borders change outcomes for migrants, communities, and safety?

Nations are shaped by both physical geography and the strength of their institutions. The way a country manages its borders affects safety, economic incentives, and human flourishing.

Learning Objectives:

- Locate and identify Colombia, neighboring countries, and key geographic features that shape movement.
- Analyze and describe the challenges that Sofia and her community face due to the unsecured border and border-related policies.
- Identify challenges from the story and explain their cause-and-effect connections to broader systems and conditions.
- Propose one supervised community action and justify how it contributes to human flourishing.

Key Vocabulary:

- **Migrant:** A person who moves from one place to another, often to find work, safety, or better living conditions.
- **Customs:** The government officials and rules that control what people and goods can bring into or take out of a country.
- **Refugee:** A person who is forced to leave their country because of danger, war, or persecution and seeks safety in another country.
- **Cartel:** A criminal organization that works together to control illegal activities such as drug trafficking or smuggling.
- **Darién Gap:** A remote, roadless jungle region between Colombia and Panama that serves as a dangerous migrant route to the United States.
- **Sovereignty:** A nation's authority and right to govern itself and control its own borders.

Educational Standards: CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2, CCRA.L.4, CCRA.L.5, CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.R.4, CCRA.R.6

Academic Subject Areas: Civics, U.S. History, Western Civilization, Social Studies, Geography, Culture, Global Awareness

What You'll Need

- Video: *Around the World: Sophia Survives the Border* (Watch [Here](#))
- Worksheet: *Around the World: Sophia Survives the Border* (Click [Here](#))

Lesson Plan (Two 45-minute Class Periods)

Part 1: Reading the Book (25-30 min)

Note to Teachers:

Scan to watch episode



- We recommend beginning this lesson with a sustained, uninterrupted read-aloud of *Around the World: Sofia Survives the Border* while students follow along on their devices or printed copies. This will take 25–30 minutes.
- This method is intentional—it rebuilds attention spans, immerses students in meaningful narrative, and restores a lost tradition: attentive listening. If possible, resist the temptation to break up the reading into smaller sessions.
- Encourage students to follow along with a pencil in hand and mark moments they find surprising, confusing, or important. After reading, allow a few moments for quiet reflection or discussion before beginning Part 2 of the lesson plan.

Part 2: Geography Focus (10-15 min)

- Activity: Use the “Geography Focus” section of the worksheet (South America + Topography of Colombia) to guide students through a mapping activity connected to Sofia’s world. Students locate and label key regions (South America, Central America, nearby seas), identify major physical features (mountains, lowlands, rivers, the Darién Gap region), and explain how terrain shapes growth and settlement.
- Discuss the following questions:
 - Why do people often build towns and travel routes near rivers and valleys?
 - Bring students’ attention to the Darién Gap – based on what you see on the map/topography, why would travel there be slow, dangerous, and hard to control?

Part 3: Vocabulary Focus and Sentence Writing (5-10 min)

- Vocabulary Focus: Introduce and define the key vocabulary terms listed in the worksheet. Discuss how these terms show up in the story and impact the characters. You may choose to pre-teach these words or explore them after reading, using the worksheet section.

Part 4: Systems, Struggles, and Solutions (20-25 min)

- Activity: Use the “Cause & Effect Chart” in the worksheet to help students connect events in the story to the broader systems and conditions that shape Sofia’s experience. These systems are the core focus of *Sofia Survives the Border* and can be discussed beforehand or used as a guide if students get stuck:
 - Geography and terrain (mountains, jungle, rivers, the Darién Gap)
 - Border insecurity and limited enforcement capacity
 - Incentives and exploitation (cartels, coyotes, trafficking networks)
 - Economic instability in neighboring countries
 - Strain on local communities and resources
 - The rule of law and national sovereignty
- Small Group or Partner Work: Students identify 2–3 problems characters face and connect them to a challenge described in the story. Then explain how that affected Sofia or other characters in the story.
- Whole-Class Debrief: Guide a discussion using these questions:

- What dangers do migrants face in the story as they travel through difficult terrain and lawless areas?
- What dangers or temptations do citizens, like Sofia, who live near a busy, illegal migrant route face?
- How does weak border control (or hard-to-control terrain) make it easier for cartels/coyotes to operate? What is the cause-and-effect link?
- What is the difference between a migrant and a refugee? Explain their motivations for movement.
- The book claims a strong border means “safety, security, and the rule of law.” Based on the story, what does “rule of law” look like in practice?
- If a government cannot or will not protect its people, what options do citizens realistically have?
- Teacher Note: This discussion helps students reconstruct the book’s concluding argument (last page) by tracing the story’s cause-and-effect chain: geography and weak control can enable illegal profit and exploitation; stronger enforcement can reduce danger and increase safety and the rule of law; reduced chaos may make legal pathways more realistic over time. Students practice supporting claims with evidence from the story rather than relying solely on opinion.

Part 5: Personal Reflection / Writing Activity (20-25 min)

- Activity: Have students complete the “Reading Comprehension and Personal Reflection” section of the worksheet. This portion reinforces key plot points and encourages students to think critically about personal responsibility, wise choices, and how individuals can contribute to human flourishing in their communities.
- Teacher Guidance:
 - Review the comprehension questions aloud or in small groups to check understanding before students begin writing.
 - Encourage students to refer to specific moments from the story in their answers.
 - For the reflection prompt, give students quiet time to think before writing. Emphasize honesty and effort over length.
 - Optional: Invite volunteers to share their reflections with the class to build connection and discussion.

Don’t have time for the full lesson? Quick Activity (25 minutes)

Step 1: Watch the *Around the World: Sophia Survives the Border* video together as a class.

Step 2: Lead a focused discussion using the discussion questions from Part 4.