



CRACKING ICE CEILINGS

DIRECTOR Mariano Carranza
DURATION 3 min

The cholita climbers of Bolivia have been subverting the culture of machismo since 2015 by climbing mountains. Not content to stay in their traditional roles as high-mountain cooks, these 11 escaladoras wanted to see for themselves what it felt like to go to the top. Pairing the traditional cholita garb of colorful skirts, shawls, bowler hats and brooches with ice axes and crampons, these women climb for the same reason many others do: that feeling of freedom that comes with standing on the summit.



Standards

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR READING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1 / Key Ideas and Details

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 / Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10 / Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR WRITING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1 / Text Types and Purposes

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4 / Production and Distribution of Writing

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5 / Production and Distribution of Writing

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR SPEAKING & LISTENING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 / Comprehension and Collaboration

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.5 / Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

Tags Bolivia, Andes Mountains, Cholitas (indigenous culture), cultural and gender equality

Key Vocabulary Cholita, stereotypes, labels, gender

Filmmaker Interview



MARIANO CARRANZA

Why did you become a filmmaker and how did you get started?

I realized that I wanted to become a filmmaker at the age of 15. I started watching movies compulsively and took a history and criticism film class. Then I decided to go to film school. I went to NYU film school here in New York City. After that I had internships and jobs for over 8 years at Vice Media and CNN's documentary division.

When you made the film, did you have a specific audience in mind?

Yes and no. Our typical audience at Great Big Story is relatively young at 18-35 years old, cosmopolitan and curious. But other than that, our audience is anyone that would enjoy a really good story.

When editing the film, was there anything you wished you could have included in the final cut?

Yes, I think this is always a tricky balance

and a delicate dance for filmmakers. There are always things that you want to include in your films. But for the sake of making it more digestible and easier to watch for a broader audience and for the sake of flow and story editing, you have to leave things out that you wanted to include.

“As a filmmaker my hope is to elicit an emotion. If I can do that then I am happy.”

Filmmakers refer to this as “killing your darlings” because when you film, there are a lot of shots that took a lot of work to get but don't fit into the narrative so you have to leave them out or 'kill your darlings'. This is something that most filmmakers have to battle with. I think for most filmmakers it is a good exercise to go back and kill your darlings.

Is there an action you hope people are inspired to take after seeing this film?

As a filmmaker my hope is to elicit an emotion. If I can do that then I am happy. If that emotion or feeling makes one want to go and do something else, then that is incredible and that is even better.

But for me as a filmmaker I am happy to make people feel something when they see the film.

What are some of the challenges you encountered while making this film?

The biggest challenge was to climb up that mountain. It was brutal! It's really hard to breathe, it's really cold and not only are you climbing, but you're also operating the camera and making sure that the image looks great and the audio is good. So it's a lot to juggle, but we made it.

What's the next big adventure or film project on the horizon for you?

Right now we are working on a film with

an organization called *Wheel the World*. It is a company that offers tourism and adventure for people with disabilities. So we went out on a few adventures with them in specially modified wheelchairs and we are looking forward to completing that one.

What is one piece of advice you can give students that you wish someone had shared with you?

Believe in yourself and in your gut, at the end of the day, that is the most important asset that you have, believing in your own gut feelings.

It's never been easier to create, so go buy a camera, buy a phone, buy anything that you can record on and start making films. You're only going to get better if you make more films.

Once you have created something that you feel really proud of, go and create a website and share it with people in the world.

Try to find your own voice and watch a lot of films and keep notes of your ideas.

Pre-Screening Activities

Dependent upon the students you are supporting, it might be helpful to start the lesson by looking at a map and identifying where Peru and Bolivia are located. Draw attention to the fact that the Andes Mountains run through Bolivia and Peru, as the Cholitas live in both countries.

Activity 1

For this activity, you will be showing your students a picture from the BBC Magazine article, titled “The Rise of the ‘Cholitas’” (February 2014):

<https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26172313>

Project the picture and ask the students what they think this picture is about. Ask the students to make some predictions.

1. **Where do you think this girl lives?**
2. **Why do you think she is dressed up?**
3. **Do you think the girl goes to school?**
4. **How old do you think she is?**
5. **Why is she holding a bouquet of flowers?**

You may just want to start with objective observations and then make subjective inferences.

Once the class has had a small discussion about the picture, ask the students why they might think some of these things about a person they have never met.



Activity 2

For this activity, students will read an article to gain more information about cholitas and their historical significance and be asked to write a prediction of the movie, *Cracking Ice Ceilings*. The article, titled “The Rise of the ‘Cholitas’” by Paula Dear for BBC Magazine (February 2014), discusses how cholitas, a routinely oppressed group, has continued to gain “real clout in the economic, political, and fashion worlds.” In addition to discussing the rise of cholitas, it breaks down the distinctive fashion features of a cholita: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-26172313>

Activity 2 (cont.)

Have physical copies of the article for every student, as they will be marking up the text as they deepen comprehension.

After reading the article as a class, or in groups (it is a longer article that some students may struggle with), have the students use one-to-two words to summarize every other paragraph.

There really is no wrong way to have the students complete the one-to-two word summaries. If you think it would be easier to have the students complete one-sentence summaries, that is also okay. The purpose is to have the students interact with the text multiple times to deepen comprehension.

attire
change
uniform
women
indigenous
pride
equality
stereotype

Example:

“They used to say ‘chola, no no!’ when we tried to go to those places,” says Carmen Mamani de Espejo, who sells flowers every Saturday at La Paz’s Rodriguez Market. “Now it’s much better for cholitas. We have more confidence now, we can walk where we like.”

GROWTH

Carmen’s day-to-day dress is classic cholita. While fashions and seasons change for cholas, as for everyone, none can stray from the “uniform” of a heavy multi-layered skirt with petticoats, long shawl, precariously perched bowler hat, jewellery and little flat pumps.

UNIFORM

Once the students have completed the one-to-two word summaries, have them choose 3-4 words and ask the students to write the words on the board.

There should be no duplicates on the board (i.e. there doesn’t need to be three separate “oppressions” on the board). You can write words on the board if you choose to forgo the first part of the activity. See example at left.

When all of the words are written on the board, pass out sticky notes and ask the students to write a one-sentence prediction using at least three to four words on the board about what they think *Cracking Ice Ceilings* will be about.

Example: “I think *Cracking Ice Ceilings* will be about indigenous women changing their uniform to gain equality.”

There is no “right” prediction and **bonus points** to the wordsmith who chooses to use all of the words on the board!

Save the predictions to review after the viewing of the movie, *Cracking Ice Ceilings*. Was anyone right?

Discussion Guide

GENERAL/OPEN PROMPTS

1. What words come to mind after viewing the movie *Cracking Ice Ceilings*? Why?
2. Why do you think this story is important?

EXPLORING SELF

1. Why do you think the cholitas thought it was important to wear their traditional attire? They could wear traditional climbing gear, but instead, they made a conscious choice to wear their attire. Why do you think that is so important?
2. In the movie, *Cracking Ice Ceilings*, Jimena Lidia Huayllas states “when we go climbing, we feel free from everything.” Can you think of an activity and/or sport that you do that helps you to feel free? Why do you think these activities help humans to feel free? Free from what?

EXPLORING THE WORLD

1. Where should the cholitas climb next? Do you think they could climb Mt. Everest in their traditional attire?

EXPLORING FILMMAKING

1. Why do you think the filmmakers chose to name the movie, *Cracking Ice Ceilings*? Can you think of another title that would be appropriate for the movie?

EXPLORING SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Why is it important to tell the story of the cholita climbers? Who should see this film? Why?
2. At the beginning of the movie, *Cracking Ice Ceilings*, it is stated that “we’ve always had a culture of machismo in Bolivia.” Do you think that is true of the United States as well? Why or why not?
3. Cholita was originally a derogatory term that the group of Bolivian and Peruvian women have repurposed and now use proudly. Why do you think it is important for the women to repurpose this term and use it as a term of pride? Can you think of other oppressed groups that have done the same?

SENSE OF WONDER

1. The Cholitas appear to be real-life superheroes. If you were to design a Cholita superhero, what would your action figure look like? Why?

Activity

MATERIALS NEEDED:

1. 8 ½ x 11 sheet of paper
2. Pencils or pens

There are several articles that tell the story of the Cholitas breaking stereotypes (Cholitas have also formed an all-women wrestling group). For this activity, you will be asking students to read an article and write two paragraphs in response to the prompt: **What stereotypes do the Cholita women challenge? After watching *Cracking Ice Ceilings*, what are some stereotypes you would like to challenge at your own school?**

Prior to reading an article, have a discussion as a class about stereotypes around the following questions:

1. What does the word stereotype mean?
2. How did the Cholitas challenge the stereotypes of their gender?
3. What are some stereotypes that exist at your school?
4. What stereotypes would you like to challenge? Why?

You can either have a whole-class discussion or partner students to think-pair-share. Since you will be asking students to write two paragraphs in response to a prompt, this quick discussion will help students to generate specific ideas prior to writing.

Once the students have answered the questions, have them choose and/or assign an article.

Article: “Interview: Cholita Climber Lidia Huayllas on Summiting Aconcagua” by Natalie Berry for *UKC* (February 2019):

https://www.ukclimbing.com/articles/features/cholita_climber_lidia_huayllas_on_summiting_aconcagua-11691

Article: “Indigenous Bolivian Women Summit Aconcagua” by Owen Clarke for *Rock and Ice* (January 2019): <https://rockandice.com/climbing-news/indigenous-bolivian-women-summit-aconcagua/>

Article: “Bolivia’s cholita climbers scale highest mountain yet: ‘I cried with emotion’” Associated Press for *The Guardian* (April 2016):

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/21/bolivia-mountain-climbers-women-cholita-aymara-illimani-peak-summits>

Article: “Meet the Women Wrestling Their Way to Equality in the High Andes” by Laurence Butet-Roch for *National Geographic* (August 2018):

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/2018/08/flying-cholitas-indigenous-women-bolivia-wrestling/>

Activity

What stereotypes do the Cholita women challenge? After watching *Cracking Ice Ceilings*, what are some stereotypes you would like to challenge at your own school?

When the students are done reading the article, you will be asking them to respond to the prompt above. For this assignment, it is the expectation that students respond with two, well-written eight-sentence paragraphs. Both paragraphs will need three supporting details, with three pieces of evidence.

For the first paragraph (about the Cholita women breaking stereotypes) students will need to use three pieces of evidence, such as a direct quote from the article they chose. Depending upon the level of support your students need, it might be helpful to outline three details and/or pieces of evidence prior to writing for each paragraph, in addition to the topic and conclusion sentence.

Example Paragraph 1:

TOPIC SENTENCE: The Cholita women challenge stereotypes by participating in a traditionally male-dominated sport, working with other women to climb, and summiting the tallest peak in South America.

SUPPORTING DETAIL 1: participating in a male-dominated sport

EVIDENCE 1: direct quote and/or piece of evidence from the article the student chose

SUPPORTING DETAIL 2: working with other women to climb

EVIDENCE 2: direct quote and/or piece of evidence from the article the student chose

SUPPORTING DETAIL 3: summiting the tallest peak in South America

EVIDENCE 3: direct quote and/or piece of evidence from the article the student chose

CONCLUSION SENTENCE: Cholita women challenge stereotypes by succeeding in a traditionally male sport, supporting other women in the same feat, and summiting Aconcagua in their traditional dress.

Example Paragraph 2:

TOPIC SENTENCE: After watching the movie, *Cracking Ice Ceilings*, I would like to challenge _____, _____, and _____ in my own school.

SUPPORTING DETAIL 1:

EVIDENCE 1:

SUPPORTING DETAIL 2:

EVIDENCE 2:

SUPPORTING DETAIL 3:

EVIDENCE 3:

CONCLUSION SENTENCE: I am inspired by the Cholita women in *Cracking Ice Ceilings* to challenge these three stereotypes that exist at my school: _____, _____, and _____.

When the students have completed their paragraphs, partner them off and have them share. When they are done sharing, ask the class if they and their partner agreed on some of the same stereotypes they would like to challenge? What could they do as a school to help break some existing stereotypes?

RECOMMENDED EXTENTIONS

Here is a link to Encyclopedia Britannica's article on the Aymara people, which outlines their history:
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Aymara>

The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media has eight free lessons for teaching Gender Equality in schools: <https://seejane.org/education/gender-equality-lessons-for-schools/>

Here is a link to *The Wrestling Cholita*, Directed by Harri Grace featured at Mountainfilm in 2018:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-EpZJKqvyY>

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