

Sample Summary:
Gloria Anzaldua's "How to Tame a Wild Tongue"

American feminist and scholar of Chicana cultural theory, Gloria Anzaldúa, published in 1987 what would become a widely acclaimed and highly influential book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In one of her chapters, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," Anzaldúa examines sexism and racism within Chicano communities and argues that language, culture, and identity are closely linked. She supports her claim with a unique and nonstandard approach to academic writing, mixing in Spanish phrases, sentences, and quotes into her English, along with incorporating various poems, personal experiences, and academic and literary sources. As Anzaldúa recalls in her chapter, Chicanos have long been deemed as deficient by both standard Spanish and standard English speakers. Working against this context, Anzaldua's purpose is to inform readers that different types of English and Spanish have cultural histories and traditions behind them. She encourages Chicanos to stop being ashamed of their culture or language and calls for an end to the many judgments and mistreatments of Chicanos. She adopts a proud and fierce tone for her audience who likely consists of academics and others interested in Chicano civil rights.

Anzaldúa begins her chapter with the analogy of an unruly tongue getting in the way of a dental procedure, which invites readers to begin questioning assumptions that Chicano Spanish speakers have a "wild tongue" that needs taming (hence, her title). She connects the frustration of the dentist to anecdotes from her life where she was made to feel ashamed for her native tongue, her Chicano Spanish, by teachers who struck her knuckles when she spoke it and by her own mother who insisted she speak English (33-34). Anzaldúa then divides her text into three sections: "Overcoming the Tradition of Silence," "Chicano Spanish," and "Linguistic Terrorism." The first section explains how Chicana girls are raised to keep their mouths shut and to not gossip or speak out against authority (34). Since Chicana girls are raised to not to use their voices, whereas boys don't receive the same treatment, Anzaldúa suggests this bias robs Chicanas of their identity and confidence. According to Anzaldúa, other Spanish speakers as well as educators also strive to silence Chicanos with academic rules (35). The author advocates for the validity of the various dialects used by Mexican Americans by drawing on her own experiences using diverse languages and by reasoning that since Chicano-Americans are a diverse group, they cannot be expected to speak a single dialect or language (36-37).

The second section reframes the historical context of Chicano language, a language influenced by both English and Spanish colonization and considered inferior. She analyzes how some French and German sayings were lost to standard Spanish, implying that different variations of Chicano language merely represent how languages naturally change and mesh throughout history, even for varieties like standard Spanish that are deemed superior (37-38). Then, in the final section, Anzaldúa asserts that judging someone's language is similar to questioning and judging that person's identity (39). Spanish speakers, she argues, have internalized incorrect views that they and their language are inferior. To challenge this problem, Anzaldúa encourages readers to realize that many cultures' languages are at risk of vanishing because there is such a strong push for speaking only English (39). She defends her voice, declaring that she will no longer be made ashamed of existing; she will use her woman's voice, her poet's voice, her sexual voice, and she will overcome the tradition of silence (40).