



## Américas Award Books on Immigration

***Breaking Through***, Francisco Jiménez.

A sequel to his award winning novel *The Circuit* (1997), the autobiographical journey of the son in a family of migrant farmworkers continues. Readers come to learn that Panchito, deported to Mexico when it seemed that his hardworking family was finally on the roads to some financial solvency, makes it back to the U.S. with his documentation in order. In the convincing voice of a young adolescent, we hear the details of his life in California in the early sixties. Not only in the fields but also throughout his high school experiences, we see Panchito straddle two worlds. He continues to be the hardworking, dutiful son in an economically struggling immigrant family and also dedicates himself to his role as a conscientious and respected student at Santa Clara High School. The tenacity and resourcefulness of this young man are simply yet powerfully revealed in the ordinary yet extraordinary events he recounts. **2001 Award Winner**

***Crossing the Wire***, Will Hobbs.

Hobbs' latest puts a human face on the controversial issue of illegal immigration. No longer able to grow corn profitably in his Mexican village, 15-year-old Victor, who has supported his family since his father's death, resolves to go to El Norte. A well-paced story with information concerning the local geography and customs woven into the plot, readers suffer with Victor as he attempts the dangerous border crossing, jumping trains, fleeing thieves and border officials, and suffering from thirst and hunger. His desperation and fear are completely believable as he faces near-death situations and must decide whom to trust. (Grades 6-12). **2006 Commended Title**

***Enrique's Journey***, Sonia Nazario.

At its heart, *Enrique's Journey* is a "true story of a boy determined to reunite with his mother." It is a journalist's account of young migrants' traumatic and perilous experiences as they travel unaccompanied from Central America to the United States. Inspired by the family histories of immigrants in her community, Sonia Nazario undertook to thoroughly research and document the experiences of young adults' journey northward. *Enrique's Journey* is a text which addresses both the nuances of the migrants' personal lives as well as the structural forces which influence their decision and affect their journey. It is a gripping narrative. *Enrique's Journey* offers young readers not only an accessible means of deepening their understanding about the issues surrounding immigration, but, more importantly, ample reason to empathize with those who undergo its travails. (Grades 9---12). **2014 Commended Title**

Classroom Resources: <http://enriquesjourney.com/educators.html>

***From North to South / Del norte al Sur***, René Colato Laínez. Illustrated by Joe

Cepeda.

Immigration and deportation are foreshadowed in a striking way in the end pages of this bilingual picture book, presenting a detailed map of the major freeways between San Diego and Tijuana. Illustrations with gentle, loving images stand juxtaposed to the depth of pain experienced by young José at the recent deportation of his mother to Mexico. José misses his mother's bedtime stories and their time spent gardening together, and can hardly wait to see her as Papá's car creeps slowly through border traffic to visit her in Tijuana. (Grades K-3). **2010 Commended Title.**

***Journey of Dreams***, Marge Pellegrino.

In this modern Underground Railroad adventure, Tomasa flees the scorched earth of her Mayan village for safe refuge in the United States. The journey with her father and two brothers takes us over mountains, through rivers and across deserts, and finally into the safety of Arizona's Sanctuary Movement, where her family reunites and begins anew as Guatemalan refugees. Tomasa's narrative woven with Mayan folktales is an important, relevant, and heart-felt history lesson that should be shared so this Central American tragedy is not forgotten. (Grades 6-8) **2010 Commended Title.**

Classroom Resources:

[http://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/vamosaleer\\_journey-of-dreams\\_3-29-13.pdf](http://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/vamosaleer_journey-of-dreams_3-29-13.pdf)

***La Línea***, Ann Jaramillo.

The hope of reuniting with his parents starts Miguel on his quest to cross the border. Just barely fifteen, Miguel gets a note from his father to seek out help to cross to California. Torn between leaving his grandmother and sister and heading toward a promise for something better, Miguel makes preparations to leave his home. The dangers of being an illegal immigrant forced to use coyotes are compounded when Elena, Miguel's younger sister decides to follow him. This contemporary realistic novel addresses some of the dangers, challenges, and emotions immigrants crossing the border face. (Grades 7- 12). **2006 Commended Title.** Classroom Resources:

<http://www.lesliepreddy.com/yhba/08-09/Middle/LaLinea-Hult.pdf>

***Mamá the Alien / Mamá La Extraterrestre***, René Colato Laínez, illustrated by Laura Lacámara.

This whimsical book with colorful illustrations takes on the important topic of immigration. When she looks at her mother's old driver's license, Sofia discovers that her mother is an "alien," and she first imagines that her mother comes from another planet, and that she must have alien friends who visit her in flying saucers. After a funny mix-up, Sofia learns that her mother's license means that she was labeled a "Resident Alien," and that card indicated that she was allowed to live and work in the United States legally. Since then, she become a Permanent Resident, and the book ends as her mother celebrates becoming a citizen of the U.S. While the book does not discuss the negative connotations of the term "alien," it does introduce key concepts of immigration to younger readers. (Grades K-3). **2017 Commended Title.**

***Migrant/Migrante***, José Manuel Mateo. Illustrated by Javier Martínez Pedro. A Mexican boy tells of his journey to the U.S. with his family. They must face many dangers to cross the border, only to experience the uncertainty felt by all illegal immigrants. The narrative is accompanied by one long, beautifully vivid illustration reminiscent of pre-Hispanic codices, packaged as an accordion-style foldout frieze (all ages). **2014 Honorable Mention**

***Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote: A Migrant's Tale***, Duncan Tonatiuh. *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* opens with festive scenes of the Rabbit family preparing for Papá Rabbit's homecoming. Musicians, family and friends gather to welcome home Papá who had traveled north to work in the carrot and lettuce fields, years before. Plates of mole, rice and beans are prepared in anticipation of his arrival and the house is strung with papel picado. When Papá Rabbit doesn't arrive, his son Pancho decides to sneak away in the dark of the night to find him. The reader follows the young rabbit as he travels north with the aid of a sneaky coyote by train, by river, by tunnel, and by desert. Tonatiuh bravely presents the controversial issue of illegal immigration through the lens of a children's fable. Inspired by 14th century Mixtec codices and traditional folklore, the author / illustrator presents the sometimes startling realities of many modern day immigrants in a form which can be appreciated by both young and old alike. (Grades K-4).

**2014 Honorable Mention.** Classroom Resources:  
<http://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?tid=36215&a=1>

***Return to Sender***, Julia Alvarez.

*Return to Sender* is as much a book about politics as it is a book about a friendship, and the transformative power it can have to sustain and nurture entire communities even in the midst of chaos. Miraculously the relationship between two young people: one, a VT farm kid who fears his family might not be able to keep their farm in tough economic times, and another, a young Mexican girl who wants only the chance for her family to live safely together, working and supporting themselves with dignity, elucidate some of the major social, political and economic concerns of the day. Alvarez's cast of characters includes people of all ages and political perspectives, and readers cannot help but conclude that getting to really know and understand our neighbors is the only way to improve life for all who live in the United States. (Grades 5-9). **2010 Award Winner.**

Classroom Resources:

[http://laili.unm.edu/outreach/common/educators---guides/2012---02\\_Return---to---Sender.pdf](http://laili.unm.edu/outreach/common/educators---guides/2012---02_Return---to---Sender.pdf)

[http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/teachers\\_guides/9780375858383.pdf](http://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/teachers_guides/9780375858383.pdf)

***Somos Como Los Nubes / We are Like the Clouds***, Jorge Argueta, illustrated by Alfonso Ruano.

Jorge Argueta's poetry and Alfonso Ruano's images complement each other

beautifully in this thoughtfully crafted book. The pages are full of both fantastical, whimsical, dream-like images and realistic illustrations, many showing the harsher aspects of life during migration from Central America and Mexico to the United States. The poems reveal both the fragility and strength of humanity. Familial relationships, especially between parent and child, are made into metaphorical comparisons with the celestial--sky, stars and the moon, those things which are eternal—even while the time and space of physical togetherness can be so fleeting. The poems offer a balance between the specifics of where the first-person narrator is from, what they remember, and what they will leave behind with the collective experience shared by many migrants from several countries who become, through the passage from global South to North, “a huge family of stars.” (Grades 3-5) **2017 Commended Title**

***The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child***, Francisco Jiménez.

The dream of this family from rural Jalisco, Mexico is to go north, cross la frontera and leave poverty behind. Papá, mamá and two young boys make the long journey and cross the barbed wire barricade without being spotted by la migra. In California, they join “the circuit” of migrant workers following the crops to be picked: strawberries, cotton, carrots. The author poignantly weaves the family’s customs, beliefs and hopes with the cruel reality of never ending migrant labor camps from which escape is nearly impossible. The family’s culture, rich in stories, love, and endurance nurtures its growth to ten members in the new environment where the dream is nearly lost. The independently told stories lend themselves to being read out loud to a wide range of audiences. **1997 Award Winner**

***The Distance Between Us***, Reyna Grande.

This memoir is the story of Reyna Grande’s journey from childhood in Mexico to becoming an American college graduate and accomplished author. This story beautifully captures what children who are left behind in Mexico experience as they long to be reunited with their parents who—ironically—have left their homeland to make a better life for them. Grande gracefully reflects on the love she had for her father who had left his family to cross over to the U.S., and recalls the ocean of emotions she experienced when she came to learn that her mother, too, was leaving. She candidly describes how she and her siblings were left under the care of her paternal grandmother who was harsh, and treated them as a burden and nuisance rather than the loving grandchildren they were. Holding true to his promise, her father returns nearly eight years later to cross his children into the United States. (Grades 5-9). **2017 Honorable Mention**

***The Only Road***, Alexandra Diaz.

*The Only Road* describes the journey of a teenage boy, Jamie, and his cousin Angela traveling from their hometown in Guatemala to the United States. Author Alexandra Diaz illustrates the many obstacles, uncertainties, hopes, fears, and unexpected blessings that shape the teens’ migration in a way that is both honest and sensitive to

its intended young adult audience. This is without a doubt an empathy building novel. Being able to accompany the main characters through their harsh and humbling trek allows the reader to get a glimpse into what tens of thousands of Central American youth have experienced in recent years. The characters themselves also demonstrate a remarkable courage and humility, often observing the sacrifices that were made for them and acknowledging the even more dangerous and devastating hardships faced by others they meet along the way. Yet Jamie and Angela are not one-dimensional by any means; they are teenagers with human emotions, needs and curiosities. They struggle with each other and with themselves. The sensory-rich prose of this novel allows the reader to be right there with the characters—as they travel hidden in the back of a pickup truck, ride on the notorious bestia, sleep on the floor of a safe house and, through it all, keep going. (Grades 7-10). **2017 Award Winner.**

***Two White Rabbits***, Jairo Buitrago, illustrated by Rafael Yockteng.

This picture book tells the story of a young girl who is migrating with her father, presumably through Central America or Mexico to the U.S., as she learns to count. Specifics of place and time are questions left to be answered; this story is an invitation to see the world through the girl's eyes, a place of certain truths and ponderings for which there is no response. Home is not a constant; she has her father and "her" clouds, which offer a vivid world of their own. The realities of border militarization and poverty exist alongside the child's imagination, keen observation, and an instinct to learn and share. Along the way, she meets and plays with a boy while her father works. Rich and detailed illustrations reveal joys and anxieties of a child's life lived in motion and the father who cares for her along the way. (Grades K-2). **2016 Commended Title**