

# Immigration in the Américas: Of Dividing Distances, Discrimination, and Dreamers

Ruth E. Quiroa, Ph.D., National Louis University

Email: [rquiroa@nl.edu](mailto:rquiroa@nl.edu) \* Office: 630.874.4563

Immigration has long been a contentious topic in the U.S., as evidenced today in the worldwide politicization around refugees escaping violence, unaccompanied Central American children entering the U.S. for safety, talk of new border walls, and of ending DACA in the U.S. Latinx stories written from the perspective of immigrant and refugee children can challenge privileged tendencies and attitudes that victimize or vilify the immigrant or refugee “other,” while also having potential to present familiar narratives to immigrant youth.

Established in 1993, the Américas Book Award for Children and Adolescents honors “U.S. published works of fiction, poetry, folklore, or selected non-fiction (from picture books to works for young adults) that authentically and engagingly portray Latin America, the Caribbean, or Latinos in the United States.”

(<http://www.claspprograms.org/pages/detail/65/About-the-Award>). Many of the titles receiving its recognition present realistic themes and issues of the region that relate to immigration. Some of these topics include violent historical and modern events that force(d) individuals and families to cross borders, to deal with documents or the lack thereof, as well as to experience the stress of potential or real deportation, family separation, and discrimination--often in a new language.

The titles below represent a majority of the Américas books published from the mid-1990s to the present with themes related to immigration, and were primarily written and illustrated by Own Voices, or individuals from the same diverse group as their protagonists. Links to educator guides from a variety of sources are provided, followed by addition resources related to immigration in the U.S.

## Book Titles

### **Primary Grades K-2:**

Argueta, Jorge. (2003). *Xochitl and the flowers*. Illus. by Carl Angel. Children’s Book Press. (Américas Commended, El Salvadoran immigrant experience in San Francisco, contemporary realistic fiction).

[https://www.leeandlow.com/books/xochitl-and-the-flowers-xochitl-la-nina-de-las-flores/teachers\\_guide](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/xochitl-and-the-flowers-xochitl-la-nina-de-las-flores/teachers_guide)

Buitrago, Jairo. (2015). *Two White Rabbits*. Tr. from Spanish by Elisa Amado. Illus. by Rafael Yockteng. Groundwood. (Américas Commended, contemporary realistic fiction, picture book, Central American country toward U.S.) <https://groundwoodbooks.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Two-White-Rabbits.pdf>

Carling, Amelia Lau. (1998). *Mama and Papa have a store*. Dial Books. (Américas Award, picture book, immigrant Chinese family in Guatemala). <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/mama-and-papa-have-a-store>

Laínez, Ren Colato. (2016). *Mamá the Alien / Mamá La Extraterrestre*, Illus. by Laura Lacámara. (Américas Commended, bilingual Spanish-English contemporary realistic fiction)

[https://www.leeandlow.com/books/mama-the-alien-mama-la-extraterrestre/teachers\\_guide](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/mama-the-alien-mama-la-extraterrestre/teachers_guide)

Laínez, René Colato. (2010) *From North to South / Del Norte al Sur*. illus. by Joe Cepeda. Children’s Book Press. (Américas Commended, bilingual Spanish-English contemporary realistic fiction, picture book, set in San Diego, CA and Mexico) <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/from-north-to-south-del-norte-al-sur>

Laínez, René Colato. (2009). *René has two last names / René tiene dos apellidos* Illus. by Fabiola Graullera Ramírez. Arte Público. (Américas Commended, bilingual Spanish-English contemporary realistic fiction, child immigrant experiences in the U.S.). <https://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?tid=18803>

Pérez, Amada Irma. (2002). *My diary from here to there / Mi diario de aquí hasta allá*. Illus. by Maya Christina González. Children’s Book Press. (Américas Commended, contemporary realistic fiction, Mexico to U.S.)

[https://www.leeandlow.com/uploads/loaded\\_document/37/My\\_Diary\\_from\\_Here\\_to\\_There\\_TG.pdf](https://www.leeandlow.com/uploads/loaded_document/37/My_Diary_from_Here_to_There_TG.pdf)

Tonatiuh, Duncan. (2013). *Pancho rabbit and the coyote: A migrant’s tale*. Harry N. Abrams. (Américas Honor, allegory, low fantasy with animal protagonists, Mexico to U.S.) <https://dev-clas.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/Americas-Award-Pancho-Rabbit-Educators-Guide.pdf>

### **Intermediate Grades 3-5:**

Alvarez, Julia. (2010). *How Tía Lola Learned to Teach*. Knopf. (Américas Commended for this title only, realistic fiction, series book two, recent immigrant grandparent from the Dominican Republic, to North Carolina and finally Vermont.) [https://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/teachers\\_guides/9780375869143.pdf](https://www.randomhouse.com/catalog/teachers_guides/9780375869143.pdf)

- *How Tía Lola came to visit-stay* (2001) (series book one)
- *How Tía Lola saved the summer* (2011) (series book three)
- *How Tía Lola ended up starting over* (2011). (series book four)

Alvarez, Julia. (2009). *Return to sender*. Knopf Books for Young Readers. (Américas Award, Contemporary Realistic Fiction, Vermont) <https://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/vamos-a-leer-return-to-sender-educators-guide.pdf>

Argueta, Jorge. (2001). *A movie in my pillow / Una película en mi almohada*. Illus. by Elizabeth Gómez. Children's Book Press. (Américas Award, poetry, El Salvadoran immigrants in San Francisco) <https://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?tid=8833&a=1>

Argueta, Jorge. (2016). *Somos como las nubes / We are like the clouds*. Transl. by Elisa Amado. Illus. Alfonso Ruano. Groundwood Books. (Américas Commended, poetry, picture book, Central America to U.S.) <https://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.wordpress.com/tag/jorge-argueta/>

Mateo, José Manuel. (2014). *Migrant: The journey of a Mexican worker*. Illus. by Javier Martínez Pedro. English translation by Emmy Smith Ready. Harry N. Abrams. (Américas Honor, realistic fiction, set in Mexico to U.S.) [http://claspprograms.org/uploads/Migrant\\_2015\\_Honor-1503498018.pdf](http://claspprograms.org/uploads/Migrant_2015_Honor-1503498018.pdf)

Resau, Laura. (2010). *Star in the Forest* Delacorte. (Américas Commended, contemporary realistic fiction, U.S. Nahuatl (Mexico) immigrants in Colorado). <https://www.lauraresau.com/star-in-the-forest-readers-guide/>

Ryan, Pam Muñoz. (2000). *Esperanza rising*. Scholastic Press. (Américas Honorable, historical fiction, Mexico-U.S.) <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/unit-plans/teaching-content/esperanza-rising-teachers-guide/>

### **Middle Level Grades 6-8:**

Agosin, Marjorie. (2014). *I lived on butterfly hill*. Ill. by Lee White. Trans. from the Spanish by E. M. O'Connor. Atheneum Books for Young People. (Américas Commended, Argentina and U.S., historical fiction, 1970s) <https://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?tid=40567>

Díaz, Alexandra. (2016). *The only road*. Simon & Schuster/Paula Wiseman Books. (Américas Award, contemporary realistic fiction, set in Guatemala to U.S.) [http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Only-Road/Alexandra-Diaz/9781481457507/reading\\_group\\_guide](http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/The-Only-Road/Alexandra-Diaz/9781481457507/reading_group_guide)

Pellegrino, Marge. (2009). *Journey of Dreams*. Frances Lincoln. (Américas Commended, historical 1980s, Guatemala-U.S.) <https://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.wordpress.com/april-2013-journey-of-dreams/>

Veciana-Suarez, Ana. (2002). *Flight to freedom*. Orchard. (Américas Commended, historical fiction, 1960s Cuban Revolution) <http://uugroton.org/nbu/public/misc/jack-wool/first-person-fiction-discussion-guide.pdf>

### **Young Adult Books Grades 8+:**

Danticat, Edwidge. (2002). *Behind the mountains*. Orchard. (Américas Commended, Haiti to U.S. fiction). [http://ngl.cengage.com/Milestones\\_Tour/Milestones\\_Tour/Media/Book\\_C\\_pages\\_74-79.pdf](http://ngl.cengage.com/Milestones_Tour/Milestones_Tour/Media/Book_C_pages_74-79.pdf) and [http://www.lindakreft.com/Americas/pdf/voices\\_behind.pdf](http://www.lindakreft.com/Americas/pdf/voices_behind.pdf)

Grande, Reyna. (2016). *The distance between us: Young reader's edition*. Aladdin. (Américas Honor, memoir, Mexico to U.S.) <http://reynagrande.com/the-distance-between-us-young-readers-edition/tdbu-curriculum-guide/>

Jaramillo, Ann. (2006). *La línea*. Roaring Brook. (Américas Commended, contemporary realistic fiction, Mexico to U.S.) <https://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.wordpress.com/october-2014-la-linea/>

Jiménez, Francisco (1997). *The circuit: Stories from the life of a migrant child*. University of New Mexico Press. (Américas Award, autobiography, Book 1, California and Mexico)  
<http://claspprograms.org/uploads/circuit-1487950851.pdf>

- (2001). *Breaking through*. HBM Books for Young Readers. (Américas Award, Mexico-California, Book 2)  
[http://claspprograms.org/uploads/breaking\\_2-1486146406.pdf](http://claspprograms.org/uploads/breaking_2-1486146406.pdf)
- (2008). *Reaching Out*. Houghton Mifflin, (Américas Commended, Book 3).
- (2015). *Taking hold: From migrant childhood to Columbia*. (Book 4)

McCall, Guadalupe Garcia (2011). *Under the Mesquite* Lee & Low Books. (Américas Honor, contemporary realistic fiction, free verse novel, southern Texas).  
<https://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/vamos-a-leer-under-the-mesquite-educators-guide.pdf>

Miller-Lachmann, Lynn. (2009). *Gringolandia*. Curbstone. (Américas Commended, Madison, WI and Chile, historical fiction, 1980s) (<https://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/vamos-a-leer-gringolandia-educators-guide.pdf>)

Nazario, Sonia. (2014). *Enrique's journey (the young adult adaptation): The true story of a boy determined to reunite with his mother*. Delacorte Books for Young Readers. (Américas Commended, nonfiction, Honduras to U.S.) <http://enriquesjourney.com/educators.html>

### Teaching Resources:

Américas Award Curriculum: Provided by CLASP (Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs):  
<http://claspprograms.org/pages/detail/62/Teaching-Resources>

González, Grace Cornell. (2013). Who can stay here? Blog entry at **De Colores: The Raza Experience in Books for Children**, <http://decoloresreviews.blogspot.com/2013/05/who-can-stay-here-documentation-and.html>

Teachingbooks.net: <https://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?wid=26>

Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/genres/americas-award>

Some of these books were featured in a *School Library Journal* article titled, "25 Kid and YA Books that Lift up Own Voices" (Quiroa, 2017): <http://www.slj.com/2017/03/diversity/immigrant-voices-focus-on/#>

### Other Websites on Immigration:

**Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services**, <http://www.brycs.org/publications/schools-toolkit.cfm>, accessed January 18, 2017. A project of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops/Migration and Refugee Services, the site maintains the "nation's largest digital resource collection" on refugee and immigrant children and families. Links to resources on family strengthening, schools, youth development, anti-trafficking, early childhood, and medical provider toolkits are provided.

**Migration Policy Institute**, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/migration-information-source>, accessed January 20, 2017. MPI is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank that provides analysis of worldwide movement of people. The site offers links to reports, fact sheets, policy statements, books, and online journal.

**National Immigrant Justice Center: A Heartland Alliance Program**, <https://www.immigrantjustice.org/issues/unaccompanied-immigrant-children>, accessed January 19, 2017. A nonprofit, nonpartisan, nonsectarian organization that provides legal services and advocacy for low-income immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers through policy reform, litigation, and public education. This site includes information on detention, anti-human trafficking, LGBT rights, asylum, and unaccompanied children, as well as specific issues and policy brief pages focusing on youth.