

Between Us and Abuela:
A Family Story from the Border
by: Mitali Perkins (Farrar Straus Giroux, 2019)

Who? In *Between Us and Abuela: A Family Story from the Border*, **María**, a young, clever and quick-witted girl from Southern California, narrates her family's story about celebrating Las Posadas at the annual La Posada Sin Fronteras celebration that occurs at the aptly named Friendship Park, which is along the border between Tijuana, MX and San Diego, CA. Prior to this celebration, María introduces us to her younger brother, **Juan**, and her

Mamá, Sylvia. María explains that sadly she hasn't seen her **Abuela** in five years; however, both María and Juan are elated that they will see their Abuela (albeit through the fences along the border) and thus are busy making final touches to their homemade presents for their Abuela.

After a long bus journey and waiting in line for their turn, María, Juan, and Mamá finally get their chance to see and talk with their beloved Abuela who stands on the other side of the border, in Mexico. Their time spent together goes by quickly as they sing Las Posadas, pass hugs and kisses through the fences, and catch up on other family members that live on either side of the border. At the end of their time together, María tries to pass the scarf that she and Mamá have made for Abuela through the fence when she is stopped by **Border Patrol Agents** that explain that it is forbidden to pass things through the fence. However, this inspires crafty María to find a different way to ensure that Abuela can receive her Christmas gifts without disobeying the Border Patrol's rules.

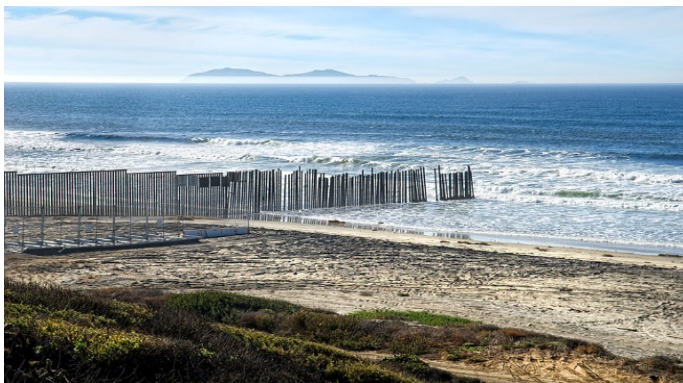
Where? What? This heartwarming tale takes place along the US-Mexican border that separates Tijuana, MX from San Diego, CA. Early on in the story, we learn that María, Juan and their Mamá live in California while their Abuela and many other relatives live in a small village in Mexico; however, despite the political border separating them, they plan to reunite at Friendship Park, which is right along the border, to spend the annual celebration of La Posada Sin Fronteras together. This is a contemporary read that many families who find themselves separated by political borders will find relatable.

Key Themes: Themes that are essential to this story include: (1) the power of art: while visiting with Abuela and trying to get their presents to her through the fence, the border patrol stop María and explain that it is prohibited to pass things through the fence; however, upon seeing Juan's drawing, the border patrol agent's stance changes. (2) migration and borders: the U.S. - Mexico border is a central element to this story; this story can facilitate discussions about immigration and the challenges that families divided by political borders endure.



This image shows family members on both sides of the border in Friendship Park.

Source: FriendshipPark.org



This image shows the fence that divides San Diego from Tijuana and runs into the Pacific Ocean. Source: CaliforniaStateParks.Gov

Additional Resources: Refer to the following links for supplemental materials that complement the ideas and themes discussed in *Between Us and Abuela*:

Ms. Carmina Reads *Between Us and Abuela* (with subtitles in English & Spanish): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeULnqJ8zaM>

Author Mitali Perkins has linked helpful resources, discussion questions, and more to her website; also, check out her upcoming book!: <https://www.mitaliperkins.com/p/between-us-and-abuela.html>