La Frontera: My Journey With Papa
by Deborah Mills and Alfredo Alva, illustrated by Claudia Navarro

Identities & Themes

- Latinx/e/ao/a (Mexican)
- Socioeconomic status
- Immigration/Migration
- Families separated
- Family structure: Single parent
- Feelings
- Identity safety

Teacher Reflection Questions

1. What myths about undocumented immigrants have you heard in your community or school? How could you respond when you hear these, so you can be a positive role model for students?

2. How can you support students in your class or school community who may be undocumented, even if you don't know or they don't know their status?

3. What can your school do to better support students who may be undocumented?

Background Information for Teacher

There is brief, but important information in the back of the book about immigration, including:
- How/why borders are formed between countries
- What a "coyote" is
- Push/pull reasons for immigrating
- Explanation of what it means to be undocumented
- How immigrants bring their culture with them

We recommend that you discuss all of this information with students before reading the book to them. The back of the book also includes Alfredo's story, whom this book was written about, photos of his life, and a map of his journey through Mexico to the U.S. See also the **Immigration/Migration Primer** in the back of this guide.

Discussion Hint: You may have undocumented students in your class or school community, and they may not even know they are undocumented. You may also never know. Talking about immigration can be polarizing, and you may feel uncomfortable. Students might have questions you don't know how to answer. It's important to think about how you will respond to their questions, any anti-immigrant comments, or microaggressions in a way that lets students know they are safe and you are there to support them. Talk with your students broadly about the topic, being careful not to single anyone out. You can also make yourself available for individual follow up questions or one-on-one conversations if students are interested. For more information on how to best support undocumented students, see this Guide for Educators (American Federation of Teachers). https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2017/im_uac-educators-guide_2017.pdf

A note on stereotypes: This book focuses on a Mexican immigrant family's experience with crossing the U.S.-Mexico border without documentation, which could inadvertently serve to reinforce negative stereotypes children may already have about Mexican American immigrants and undocumented immigration.

We have chosen to include this book for several reasons. This book is based on a true story and represents the lived experience of many Mexican American immigrants. While we are cautious of reinforcing negative stereotypes about Latinx immigration, we also believe this topic must be talked about with children of all ages because of the stigma, bias, and prejudice that Latinx/e/o/a children experience, regardless of immigration status. We believe this book is an important mirror for Latinx/e/o/a children and their families who migrated across the U.S.-Mexican border for the dream of a better life to have their lived experiences affirmed and destigmatized. See the **Immigration/Migration Primer** in the back of the curriculum guide for more information.

Anti-Bias Education Tenets

- ☑ **Empathy & Understanding**
- ☑ **Healthy Complex Identities**
- ☑ **Respect Across Differences**
- ☐ **Notice, Name, & Reject Bias**
- ☐ **Responsiveness & Action**

Social-Emotional Learning Competencies

- ☑ **Self-Awareness**
- ☑ **Self-Management**
- ☑ **Social Awareness**
- ☑ **Responsible Decision Making**
- ☐ **Relationship Skills**

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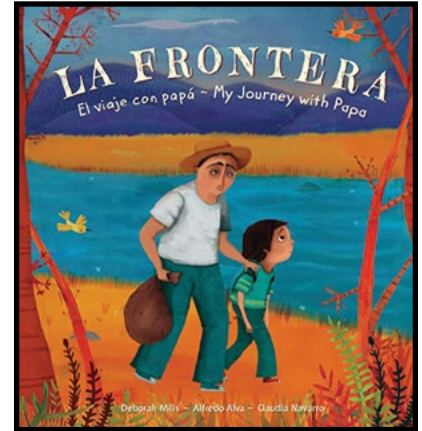## Read this to the students before reading the book:

This book follows a boy named Alfredo and his Papa as they make a treacherous trip from Mexico to the United States. It is an immigration story that offers a new perspective on why some people choose to cross the border for the safety and security of their family and the challenges of being a new immigrant.

Discussion Questions (essential questions bolded)

1. **What struggles did Alfredo's family face in Mexico that drove them to come to the United States?**

2. **What is a "coyote"? Why did Papa hire Coyote?**

3. Why do you think Alfredo's mother didn't tell Alfredo he would not see her or his brothers and sisters for many years?

4. Why do you think the Coyote wasn't there when they reached the other side of the river?

5. **What kept Alfredo and Papa going throughout their journey?**

6. **When you have to endure something difficult, what keeps you going?**

7. Why does Papa give Alfredo the $100 when he starts school? Why does Alfredo need to watch out for men in uniforms?

8. How did Alfredo feel when he first started at his new school? Why?

9. How did other children treat Alfredo when he first started at his new school?

10. **Why did things change for the better for Alfredo at school once Antonio came to see him? How did Alfredo's teacher and classmates help him?**

11. **How can you help new students feel like they belong from the beginning, regardless of where they came from?**

Journal Prompts & Extension Activities

1. Papa chose to leave Mexico for the United States because his family had limited food, and there were limited jobs available. What would you have done in Papa's situation, if you needed to feed your family?

2. **Understanding Immigration**: Research U.S. immigration laws to learn more about the different kinds of visas and how many are given out each year based on a person's country of origin. Use the videos and stories on https://www.greencardvoices.org to make a list of push/pull factors that influence the decisions of immigrants coming to the U.S.

Literacy Connections

- Realistic fiction
- Identify details in the text
- Compare and contrast events
- Compare and contrast settings
- Compare and contrast characters
- Identify theme or main message
- Describe setting
- Describe characters/ Character development
- Character point of view
- Use illustrations/pictures/ photos to gain information
- Make predictions
- Make inferences
- Make text connections (to self, text, the world)
- Describe major plot events
- Sequence events