



Somos como las nubes/We Are Like the Clouds

Written by Jorge Argueta

Illustrated by Alfonso Ruano

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Poetry books based on a theme are readily available, but this book is a unique collection in that genre--bilingual poems describing the immigrant experience of thousands of children and teens from El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras and Mexico. But more than just description, these are the voices of children who have made the hard decision to leave what they love, seeking safety and the chance to be with loved ones.

Jorge Argueta is the natural person to write these poems since he fled El Salvador in the 1980s.

Argueta first introduces readers to the children's dreams and their homes as the children describe the familiar landscapes they have grown up in: volcanic mountains, flame trees, colorful birds, fields of corn, vegetables and fruit, and finally one of the joys of childhood, coconut pop-sicles sold by Mr. Silvario. The poet then introduces readers to the reasons children make the tough decision to leave--gangs with identifying tattoos, bullies, and parents already in the United States. The journey across several countries by foot, by Beast (train), and with guides (coyotes) is long, but the many kilometers give the children time to remember family, schools and pets, and dream of the future. The travelers sing to ward off fatigue and fear, and listen to the constant music of birds and crickets. As children band together for safety, their voices reflect the varieties of Spanish words from across Central American countries. A climactic poem describes meeting the border guard, asking for asylum, and a prayer to the patron saint of immigrants for safety from *la migra*, the traffickers and the minutemen. The final poems about clouds and *paletas* act as a bookend with the initial poems. They describe life with reunited family members, reiterating the dreams of the children and the pull of two different homes.

The acrylic illustrations are surrealistic as the children describe their dreams and fears but quickly move into muted realistic portrayals as decisions are made to leave and the journey begins. Striking is the range in ages portrayed--children traveling alone, with younger siblings, or with single parents.

The poems are based on the work that Jorge Argueta has done with young people in Mexico and the United States. The poems also reflect the stories of many of the children who are the focus of an IBBY-REFORMA project. Currently the artwork for this book is part of a silent auction to support the efforts of this project serving the over 120,000 Central American youth who have walked across the border.

Many books describe refugee journeys that pair well with *Somos como las nubes/We Are Like the Clouds*. Refugee journeys, whether in the Sudan, Cambodia, Syria, or Mexico, share the commonality of taking the risk to travel to safety but at the same time longing for what used to be. Several in particular describe journeys across South and Central America to the United

States. *La Línea* is a novel based on many of the stories author Ann Jaramillo (2008) heard from her students in California. The picturebooks *Two White Rabbits* (Jairo Buitrago, 2015) and *Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote* (Duncan Tonatiuh, 2013) describe the journey on the train and across the desert to the border.

Jorge Argueta is a celebrated poet and writer whose bilingual children's books have received numerous awards. He is well-known for his picturebooks of cooking poems *Guacamole* (2015), *Salsa* (2016), and *Sopa de frijoles/Bean Soup* (2017). A native Salvadoran and Pipil Nahuatl Indian, Jorge spent much of his childhood in rural El Salvador. He feels that everybody is capable of writing, especially young children who are natural poets.

Alfonso Ruano is an award-winning illustrator from Spain. He has been the artistic director of a publishing house in Spain since 1976 and illustrated *The Composition* by Antonia Skarmeta.

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