



IMMIGRATION from MEXICO to the U.S.A.



**A Discussion Guide by Laura Resau,
Author of *Star in the Forest*
(Expanded from the Author's Note
on p. 141)**

I felt inspired to write *Star in the Forest* after hearing from a twelve-year-old girl who enjoyed my book *What the Moon Saw*, and connected with the main character, Clara. This girl pointed out one big difference: Clara was born in the United States, and could freely cross the Mexican border. This girl, however, was born in Mexico and immigrated here illegally with her family. Now she wanted to visit her relatives in Mexico, especially her father, who was recently deported. But if she went, it would be too dangerous to return. **Why do you think this is? How would you feel in this girl's situation?**



1.

As long as humans have existed, they have migrated-- moved from one place to another-- in search of a better life for their families. **Can you think of reasons why people might need to leave their old homes to find new ones?**

Whenever humans move, they need to adapt--or get used to-- their new communities. And if people already are living there, those people need to adapt to the newcomers. **What are some problems the two groups might have in adapting to one another?**

The United States is special because we are a "nation of immigrants." Most Americans have ancestors who came here in the past few hundred years. Even Native Americans migrated here from Asia, thousands of years ago. **Where did your family or ancestors migrate from?**

People have moved to the United States for different reasons-- sometimes to escape poverty, violence, crime, religious persecution, and racism; and sometimes to find better jobs, educations, and other opportunities. They have always come with hopes of creating good lives for their families. **Why do you think your family or ancestors came here?**



2.

Like people everywhere, Americans have faced challenges adapting to every new wave of immigrants, whether they were Irish in the 1840's, Chinese in the 1870's, Italian in the 1890's, Polish in the 1900's, or Mexican in the 1990's. Throughout history, people have worried that the newcomers would change their lives for the worse. They have feared that the migrants would take their jobs, crowd their communities, bring crime, hurt their values, or damage their culture. Another common feeling has been a sense of unfairness that immigrants use services like schools and hospitals. Some people have felt threatened or frustrated that the newcomers don't always speak their language or share their customs. **Can you think of other worries that people might have had about immigrants?**

On the other hand, many Americans have focused on the good things that newcomers have brought to their communities. Thanks to immigration, the U.S. has an exciting variety of music, languages, and foods that make people's lives richer. Many Americans have understood that newcomers are often escaping poverty or other tough circumstances, and that they have come for a better life. Immigrants have contributed in many ways, bringing good family and work values, while paying taxes, buying things, and doing

much-needed work. **Can you think of some other good things that immigrants have brought to their new homes?**



3.

There are many stories of human migration in the history of the world, and especially in the history of our country. Mexican immigration is one such story. Until 1912, when Arizona and New Mexico became states, Mexicans came and went freely across our common border. From 1920 until 1965, the U.S. and Mexico agreed to allow many Mexican laborers to cross the border to do needed work in America. Some of these workers regularly visited their families in Mexico, some worked a few years and then returned to Mexico, and some stayed and became American citizens.

In 1965, the U.S. changed the immigration laws. Now people had to wait a long time for a visa-- or permission-- to enter the country to work. But as more and more physically demanding jobs were created in the U.S., there were not enough people with visas to fill them. These available jobs encouraged many Mexicans to cross the long border without waiting for permission. Over the next few decades, the number of Mexican workers without visas in the U.S. grew bigger and bigger. Because the number of

jobs that needed to be filled was also growing bigger, the American government tolerated a certain level of illegal immigration. By the mid to late 1990s, millions of Mexican immigrants without visas were coming to work in the U.S., mainly to escape widespread poverty in Mexico.



4.

During the mid to late 1990s, I was living in a beautiful, but poor, region of Oaxaca, Mexico. There weren't many ways to earn money in the villages, so nearly everyone I knew had relatives working in the U.S., often as dishwashers, construction workers, and hotel maids. The workers sent money to their families in Mexico to pay for basic needs. My friends explained that while it was sad to have loved ones so far away, the extra money paid for their families' food, homes, and education. Imagine yourself in their place. **If you lived in poverty, what would you do to give your family a better life?**

After I moved from Mexico to the Southwest U.S., I became friends with many Latin Americans who were working here without visas, which made them undocumented migrants. In the past several years—the 2000s-- the American government has tried hard to enforce immigration laws by putting

more guards and fencing at the border, punishing American companies that hire undocumented migrants, and making it difficult for undocumented migrants to get a driver's license.



5.

Recently, life has become very hard for my immigrant friends and their kids. Because they fear being deported, bosses and co-workers can take advantage of them. And because of the increased security at the border, migrants are forced to cross in more remote places, where they might be assaulted by thieves or kidnappers. Now many migrants feel too scared to return to Mexico to visit their relatives and communities. Other migrants have returned to live in Mexico even though it's very hard for them to find decent-paying jobs there. Some migrants have been deported to Mexico, often leaving their wives or husbands or children behind.

This situation is especially hard for the children of Mexican immigrants. These kids have spent most of their lives in the U.S., gone to American schools, and speak English perfectly. They feel at home in the U.S, but without legal papers, their opportunities for college and future jobs are

limited. **How would you feel if you were in their situation? What would you do?**

Right now, hardly anyone is happy with the state of undocumented migration to the U.S. Almost everyone agrees that we need to change the situation, either by preventing undocumented migrants from coming and working, or by making it easier for migrants to come and work legally. Some people have proposed laws that would let undocumented migrant children and teens get legal status so that they can go to college and find professional jobs here. **What do you think the solution is? Why?**



GLOSSARY

Adapt
Assault
Deport
Immigrant
Immigrate
Migrant
Migrate
Physically demanding
Tolerate
Undocumented migrant
Visa



For information about the author and her inspiration for *Star in the Forest*, please visit her at <http://www.LauraResau.com> .