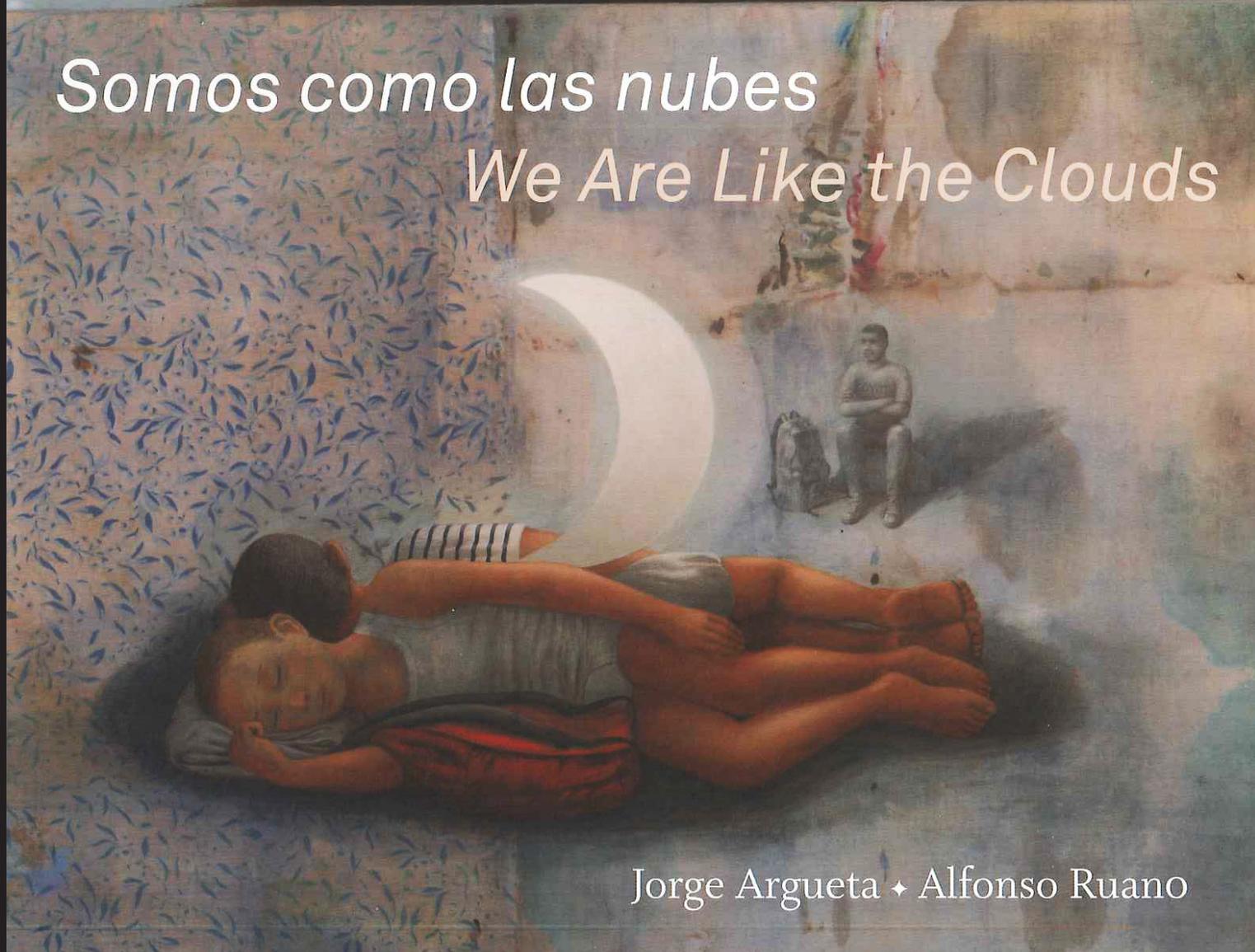




*Somos como las nubes*  
*We Are Like the Clouds*



Jorge Argueta ♦ Alfonso Ruano

A TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR  
WE ARE LIKE THE CLOUDS BY JORGE ARGUETA AND ALFONSO RUANO

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This teacher's guide was written to encourage the use of *We Are Like the Clouds* in schools. This teacher's guide was written by Dr. HyoJung Jang, Stanford Program on International and Cross-Cultural Education (SPICE), Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies at Stanford University. Aime Chao, student, Live Oak School, San Francisco; Ana Maria Griffin Morimoto, student, Special Music School, New York City; Kalia Lai, student, The College Preparatory School, Oakland; and Seiji Yang, Menlo School, Atherton, contributed their reflections on the book.

The Consortium of Latin American Studies Programs (CLASP) founded the Américas Award in 1993 to encourage and commend authors, illustrators, and publishers who produce quality children's and young adult books that portray Latin America, the Caribbean, or Latinos in the United States, and to provide teachers with recommendations for classroom use. CLASP offers up to two annual book awards, together with a recommended list of titles. For more information concerning the Américas Award, including additional classroom resources, please visit the CLASP website at <http://www.claspprograms.org/>.

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# WE ARE LIKE THE CLOUDS

## Recommended Grade levels

Upper elementary and middle schools

## Recommended Subjects

Social Studies, U.S. history, world history, language arts

## Connections to Common Core Standards

Please note that the standards listed below are Anchor Standards. Specific grade level standards can be found at <http://www.corestandards.org>.

### *English Language Arts Standards: Reading*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific words choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

### *English Language Arts Standards: Writing*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2: Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

*English Language Arts Standards: Speaking and Listening*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRASL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

*English Language Arts Standards: Language*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.3: Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.4: Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

*History/Social Studies: Key Ideas and Details*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source: provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.3

Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history / social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).

*History/Social Studies: Crafts and Structure*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5

Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

*History/Social Studies: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8

Distinguish among fact opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9

Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

**Note to Teachers**

Teachers may also consider using this book to address specific state history-social science standards that focus on immigration and migration, including the diverse countries of origin of those who came, their relative locations, and the conflicts and accords among the diverse groups.

The procedures used in this teacher's guide are inspired by the "into, through, and beyond" literature approach described in the following article:

Brinton, D.M., Goodwin J., & Ranks, L. (1994). Helping language minority students read and write analytically: The journey into, through, and beyond. In F. Peitzman & G. Gadda (Eds.), *With different eyes: Insights into teaching language minority students across the disciplines*, pp. 57–88. White Plains, NY: Longman.

**Key Topics**

migration, migrant children, Central America, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and the United States

Key Themes freedom, safety, refugees, hope, perseverance

Materials Book, *We Are Like the Clouds*  
Questions and Activity Strips

Organizing Questions

- What is international migration? What are some common “push” and “pull” factors?
- What has been the historical migration patterns between countries in Central America and the United States? Why do people from Central America and Mexico migrate to the United States? What are some “pull” and “push” factors in these cases?
- How does the migration experience affect children as depicted in the poems? In what ways are the migrant children like the clouds?

Procedures

1. **Into the Literature:** To set the context for *We Are Like the Clouds*, ask students to identify where El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico are located in relation to the United States and each other. [*Answers may vary. Mexico is closest to the United States and borders four U.S. states, including California, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. Guatemala borders southern Mexico, which is between the United States and Guatemala. El Salvador and Honduras are adjacent to each other and both border Guatemala.*] What do you know about the relations between these countries and the United States, with respect to migration patterns? What do you hear most about these countries in the news? [*Answers will vary, including migration, refugees, and so forth.*]
2. Explain to students that the book is one of poems depicting the experiences of children fleeing their home countries in Central America to migrate to the United States in hopes of seeking safety. Point out to students that each poem is written in both English and Spanish. Ask some of the following questions:
  - a. What is migration?
  - b. Why do people migrate to another country? What are some “push” and “pull” factors in migration?
  - c. Why and how do people from Central America and Mexico migrate to the United States?
3. **Through the Literature:** Divide the class into small groups of 2–3 students. Distribute one of the Question and Activity Strips to each group. There are a total of 20 Question and Activity Strips. Each strip corresponds with a poem in the book.
4. Read the book, *We Are Like the Clouds*, with the students. Pass the book around and ask each student to read one poem around the class. Each group should pay particular attention to the corresponding poem in the book as it is read.

5. Allow student groups the rest of the class period and homework time, if necessary, to work on the questions and activities on the Question and Activity Strips. Allow students access to the book.
6. During the next class period, allow each student group five minutes each to present a summary of its responses to the questions and their project.
7. **Beyond the Literature:** Choose among the following:
  - a. Have students write a one-page textbook entry about the background in the migration patterns from countries in Central America and Mexico to the United States and the experiences of children traveling to the United States in search of safety and family reunion in some cases.
  - b. Have students write a news article about the potential hardships or challenges that children encounter on their way to the United States, based on one or more of the poems in the book.
  - c. Have students draw or illustrate with pictures based on one or more poems in the book.
  - d. Have students write their reflections (See student Sample Reflections on the next few pages) on one or more of the poems in the book, using the following prompts:
    - i. What significance does the poem hold for you? (No more than two paragraphs)
    - ii. Develop your own short poem that references information in one or more of the poems.
    - iii. Does the poem remind you of a historical or current event? If so, which event and what are your thoughts on the historical or current event? (No more than two paragraphs)



[Prompt i: What significance does the poem hold for you?

Prompt iii: Does the poem remind you of a historical or current event? If so, which event and what are your thoughts on the historical or current event?]

**Reflections on the Significance of Poems “We Are Like the Clouds” & “The Azacuanes”**  
by **Aimee Chao**, a student at Live Oak School, San Francisco

Clouds, wind, butterflies, rivers, and oceans all have one thing in common: freedom. They can pass through borders and cannot be stopped; they can go anywhere. Freedom in America is under question, especially when talking about undocumented immigrants. Many have the understanding that Americans have freedom, but who is American? Is being American, self-identified or is it a title given due to legal residency? Many undocumented immigrants consider themselves as Americans, they live here, and they live the American way. For undocumented immigrants who came as children, they feel an even stronger connection with America; it is their home, where they grew up in, the only place they have a real understanding of. America to these migrants means safety, stable economics, jobs, families, and a land in which they can prosper. Nevertheless, undocumented immigrants live in constant fear of being torn from their families and taken back to their country of birth. The promise of freedom is ingrained in the United States, initially favoring European immigrants, but today we consider freedom for all people. People from all over the world have come to America seeking a better life. However, for “illegal immigrants,” freedom is harder to secure. They pay taxes and work hard even if they are underpaid, yet they are not considered Americans by America. They just do not have the papers saying they have legal status, that is all that sets them apart from Americans.

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) was a program initiated in 2012, during the Obama administration to give temporary legal status to undocumented immigrants who entered the United States when they were children. The requirements are strict and not every applicant is awarded permission to stay. Some of those who have come as children do not meet the age cut off and are still at risk of being deported to a country they have little knowledge of. Recently, DACA has been rescinded by the Trump Administration. However, a judge has declared that DACA must stay in action, for now. The future of DACA and the lives of hundreds of thousands of those under DACA are unknown. The focus on undocumented immigrants has been targeted towards those from Latin America. Currently, an agreement about funding for a wall at the Mexico-U.S. border is being discussed within Congress. In the past couple of years at the border, children have been taken from parents and detained, while provisions set out by humanitarian organizations are taken and dumped. The border has become a one-way war, with migrants taking the blows.

I do not believe the “freedom” the United States as advertised should be demonstrated in this manner. Everyone has a different definition of freedom and what it means to be an American. Therefore, the debate on DACA and the wall will continue along with other social justice issues. Being clouds, wind, butterflies, rivers, and oceans is something we can only dream of. Yet, I believe we can make it possible for everyone to ride the clouds, the wind, butterflies, rivers, and oceans, once for the opportunity of freedom and the journey there.

[Prompt ii: Develop your own short poem that references information in one or more of the poems.]

“The Song of the Bells” by Aimee Chao, a student at Live Oak School, San Francisco

The sweet song,  
Which rang throughout,  
Is a distant memory.  
It welcomed the sun, and greeted the moon.  
It was sung by mothers at noon.  
The song which told of time and the silent night breeze.  
The song I try to listen for with the moon above my head.

I know I will never hear it.

The ones who have only one eye  
Can only see one side.  
They play a different tune to hurt me  
To enchant the snakes nearby.  
Their venom is fatal if not accepted.  
No one is known to have rejected.  
And the tune is heard everywhere.  
Ringing in my ears as I pass by  
With my head down, my feet hitting the dusty ground  
Trying to listen for the old sweet sound  
Their tune grows louder as I grow taller.

I must not sing it.

My heart has a rhythm only known to me.  
A rhythm which I can sing to  
A rhythm I use to help me run  
Down the streets below the moon  
Leaving my father and my mother  
My sisters and my brothers  
For, my heart has a rhythm  
And the song that goes with it  
Tells of a place with a new sweet song.

**[Prompt i: What significance does the poem hold for you?]**

**Poem reflections on “We Sing”** by **Kalia Lai**, a student at The College Preparatory School, Oakland, California

From the title “We Sing,” one might guess that the poem will be an uplifting piece where friends gather round and sing merrily. Indeed, “We Sing” is an uplifting poem, but rather a depiction of a young migrant’s hope, who touches on the fear that persists throughout his journey to America. The boy, a child likely younger than I am, says, “Since we left home, we haven’t stopped singing.” Abandoning his home and entire life requires incredible courage, something most people will never be forced to experience. He carries a larger burden than he should, having probably left behind his family to travel with his father to find employment and support their family.

Historically, music plays a large role in expressing stories and experience, and the migrants’ songs keep them going. The boy adds, “If we keep singing, we’ll scare away all the tiredness and the fear,” emphasizing their troubles can be eased with their hopes. Their unity makes them stronger, even in the midst of the fear of deportation, gangs, and death. “We Sing” reminded me of the tireless resolve migrants must maintain to survive their journey and the respect they deserve.

**[Prompt ii: Develop your own short poem that references information in one or more of the poems.]**

**“Scarlet Petals”** by **Kalia Lai**, The College Preparatory School, Oakland, California (based on the poem “Flame Tree”)

The flame tree flowers,  
its flowers blossom,  
a blossom burns.

The scarlet petals scatter  
in the clouds  
and streak the sky  
far from their roots.

Poetic elements

Flame Tree: words (flame tree, flowers), epiphora, imagery (fiery colors), free-verse

Scarlet Petals: words (flame tree, flowers), gradatio, alliteration, free-verse

**[Prompt i: What significance does the poem hold for you?]**

**Reflection on the poems** by **Ana Maria Griffin Morimoto**, a student at Special Music School, New York City, New York

I found this book to be extremely powerful. I am from Colombia and was adopted at the age of 15. I came to the U.S. full of dreams and expectations to be the best of myself, to be fully and completely happy, but the world is a strange place and I found myself alone many times. The way I spoke and the things I said did not match what the people around me said. And this put me on a place outside of the cloud where, I knew I was there but I really wasn't.

**[Prompt ii: Develop your own short poem that references information in one or more of the poems.]**

**Motion** by **Ana Maria Griffin Morimoto**, a student at Special Music School, New York City, New York

Motion keeps humanity alive  
Motion gives meaning to the everyday  
But somehow motion takes away the feeling of belonging  
Seeing a cloud of people walk right in front of you, while you stand still.  
Almost breathless.

Motion gives us hope, of new beginnings,  
But that same motions puts us in places, we feel strange in  
In societies where the color of your skin determines the person you are  
In groups of people where dancing is for the crazy, and smiling is not allowed.

Motion comes from fear, or dreams, or aspirations to become more.  
But, more of what?, probably anything. Just not a thief, a prostitute or a drug dealer  
A maid would do just fine, although i always dreamed to be a singer,

But the world is in motion no matter what.

[Prompt i: What significance does the poem hold for you?]

**Reflections on “Las Chinamas” by Seiji Yang**, a student at Menlo School, Atherton

The isolated lives of children at the Southern Border is captured by the poem, “Las Chinamas” by Jorge Argueta. Readers experience the adversity of Pan-American immigration through the eyes of a young child. At the surface, the poem portrays a joyous perspective of a child who recollects happy memories of *gualcalchillas* in the schoolyard. I interpreted the *gualcalchillas*, or fledgling songbirds, as a representation of innocent hope and untapped freedom. Whereas adults may be absorbed by the daily logistics and reality of immigration, the child recognizes the “smiling water” and the mockingbirds, which “never stop singing.” In the final stanza, however, the tone drastically shifts. The boy’s voice is tainted by his unstable life as an immigrant. He wonders to himself, “Who knows when I will see [my family] again,” and thinks of himself and his family “like the clouds,” which reveals the uncertainty that has consumed his life. Clouds, like his family, are ephemeral and temporary. The unpredictability of the boy’s life has been ingrained into his subconscious. Nevertheless, the hope expressed in the singing mockingbirds is the proof of his ability to reconcile his loneliness with the harsh reality of the raw world. This aptitude reveals the young boy’s invulnerable sense of independence.

Reading this poem, I could not help but think of the experience of my paternal grandfather, who was separated from his family to immigrate from Taiwan to Japan in the 1930s as a teenager. Although my grandfather died before I was born, I heard many stories about him from my father and grandmother, which parallels the hardships of the boy from “Las Chinamas.” In Japan, he became an attorney and served at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the pre-WWII era. He was later sent to Manchuria by the Japanese government to assist the persecution of Chinese citizens. There, I have been told, my grandfather secretly saved the native Manchurians by issuing legal documents to prevent them from being executed. The hardships as a young immigrant, and his experiences “at the border” where numerous people faced adversity on a daily basis, parallels the feeling captured in “Las Chinamas.” When my young grandfather was crossing his own “border” almost 90 years ago, perhaps he looked up at the sky and saw in the clouds the same turmoil that the boy from “Las Chinamas” experienced. Similar to how my grandfather spent a fulfilling life in Japan after reconciling the challenges of this harrowing assignment, the boy is able to maintain hope despite his separation from family members. Jorge Argueta’s poem allows me to imagine my own grandfather seeing the smiling water and hearing the mockingbirds sing the songs of independence.

QUESTION AND ACTIVITY STRIPS

**Poem 1 “We Are Like the Clouds”**

What is the poem about?

What are the characteristics of the clouds? How are the migrant children like the clouds?

Activity: Think of two to three ways that the migrant children are like the clouds and at least one way that they are not.

**Poem 2 “My Neighborhood”**

**Poem 3 “The Azacuanes”**

**Poem 4 “Flame Tree”**

Where is San Jacinto?

What do these poems illustrate about the children’s sentiment about their neighborhoods in their hometowns?

What are some of the particular things or people you remember about your neighborhood?

What emotions do they evoke?

Activity: Write a short poem about your neighborhood. Try to depict things or people that stand out or have special meanings to you.

**Poem 5 “La Campanera (bell tower) Neighborhood”**

What does the bell tower without bells say about the neighborhood?

Who are the “painted people” who have “hard eyes” and whose “arms, faces, chests, and backs are homes to tattoos like snakes”?

What emotions do you feel when you look at the illustration of the “painted people,” one of whom is holding a machete?

Activity: Imagine that you are a reporter. Write a short paragraph about this neighborhood with the “painted people” and children.

**Poem 6 “The Talker”**

Why does the author want to go far away from the “talker”?

What can you tell about the general mood of the neighborhood where the “talker” gives orders to the gang?

Activity: How would you feel if you lived in a neighborhood where there were gangs? Briefly describe what you would do in a few sentences.

**Poem 7 “iPod”**

Why did the friend sell his iPod?

Where was the friend going?

Have you ever said goodbye to a good friend leaving to a foreign country or to another state?

What was it like?

Activity: Write a letter to a friend who is leaving for another country.

**Poem 8 “Las Chinamas” (the border between El Salvador and Guatemala)**

What is the author portraying in this poem?

Where is the child in the poem going? Is he/she by himself/herself? What might be some of the potential dangers for doing that?

Why wouldn't the child in the poem know when he/she will see his/her mother, brothers, and sisters?

Activity: Write a diary entry (one paragraph) about your thoughts and feelings if you were the child crossing the border between El Salvador and Guatemala.

**Poem 9 “My Father Tells Me”**

What is this poem about?

Why is the child scared of the trains on which the migrants travel?

Activity: Think of a time when you were on a very crowded train or bus, or in a very crowded place. Now imagine traveling on a very crowded train illustrated in the book and write down three things you want to bring on the train.

**Poem 10 “The Desert”**

Based on the illustration, what can you infer from the poem? Is the child in the poem really running through the desert with his mother? Why or why not?

Activity: From the parents' perspective, write a letter to the children who are going to be sleeping in the desert on their long journey. What would you like them to know?

**Poem 11 “The Crickets”**

What does the image of a child sleeping in his mother's chest convey? What does the cricket's singing symbolize or mean to the child, if at all?

Activity: Write a short poem about your feelings when your mother/father hugs you.

**Poem 12 “The Desert Sand”**

What would be some dangers of sleeping on the desert sand with coyotes around, especially without an adult guardian?

Have you ever had an experience where you on your own away from your parents for several days?

Activity: Imagine you are traveling on your own in unknown places and miss your parents, like the children in the poem. Think about how your parents might feel. Write a letter to your parents.

**Poem 13 “Racehorse”**

What is the father doing for his son in this poem? Why would the father do that?

What is the mood of the child?

Activity: Think about a time when you felt safe and secure by your parents’ help in times of difficulties. Draw that on a piece of paper.

**Poem 14 “We Sing”**

What does singing do when you feel tired or scared?

Describe a time when singing songs helped you overcome or change your feelings such as fears.

Activity: Write lyrics to the song that the father and his child in the poem might be singing.

**Poem 15 “We Introduce Ourselves to the Border Patrol”**

What is the border patrol and what do they do?

Describe the mixture of emotions that is evoked from this poem and the illustration.

Activity: Write a few sentences to introduce yourself to the border patrol.

**Poem 16 “My Name is Ramon”**

Where is Ramon headed? Given where Ramon is headed, why aren’t the angels in the sky but behind the hills, beyond the desert?

Activity: Calculate the distance between El Salvador and Los Angeles.

**Poem 17 “Santo Toribio”**

Who is Santo Toribio?

What are the children asking Santo Toribio to do in this poem?

Why do the children ask for protection from the “migra” (Immigration Services), traffickers, and the “minutemen” (armed patrol of civilians)?

What fears do they have for each of the three groups of people?

Activity: If you were Santo Toribio, what would you do to answer the children's prayer? In other words, how would you answer the children's prayer?

**Poem 18 "We Are Like the Clouds"**

In what ways are the children like the clouds, the wind, the butterflies, the rivers, and the ocean? What are their common characteristics?

Activity: Add more lines to the poem with things that depict the children and their experiences.

**Poem 19 "Dream"**

What does the dream say about the child's journey?

How would you feel when you see your mother for the first time after months and perhaps years? What would you say to her?

Activity: Map out the child's journey on Google Maps and estimate the time it would take to walk from El Salvador to Los Angeles.

**Poem 20 "The Paleta (fruit popsicles) Seller"**

What is this poem about?

What does it say about the child's experience and mood?

Activity: Write a letter to the child who made it to Los Angeles on foot from Central America. What would you tell him/her?