

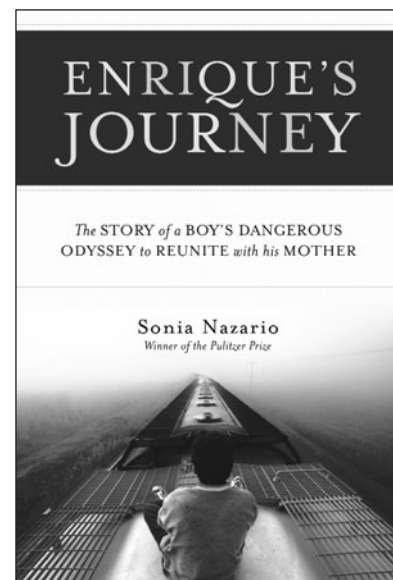


Enrique's Journey

The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother

by Sonia Nazario

Random House | Trade Paperback
978-0-8129-7178-1 | 336 pages | \$16.00/\$19.95C
Reading Level: 7.0



note to teachers

Originally written as a newspaper series for the *Los Angeles Times*, *Enrique's Journey* tells the true story of a Honduran boy's journey to find his mother in America. As a literary text, the work lends itself easily to the study of primary elements: plot, setting, character, theme, etc. Beginning in Honduras with Enrique's mother (Lourdes), the text follows multiple story lines (those of Lourdes, Enrique, Enrique's girlfriend, immigrant care workers, and other immigrants). The text also includes multiple characters and encourages an analysis of their motivations and the results of their actions. *Enrique's Journey* will also provide the catalyst for meaningful discussions of universal themes such as parent-child conflict, family responsibility, separation, and assimilation into new cultures.

As a social commentary, this work will fit easily into any social studies classroom or into any class's discussions of the issues the text presents. Immigration policies in both the United States and Mexico are brought sharply into focus through this narrative. In addition, the incredibly divergent attitudes of the people with whom Enrique has contact will provoke discussion of and offer opportunities for analysis of the opinions toward immigration held by different cultures. The narrative also deals with other social issues that can prompt study and discussion, such as: poverty, economic policy (in the United States, Mexico, and Central America), race relations, and gang activity.

Ultimately, *Enrique's Journey* can provide challenging and appropriate study for middle school through college students. Its story line and themes will lend themselves easily to multiple levels of examination, in many different classroom settings.

COMMON READING PROGRAMS THAT HAVE SELECTED ENRIQUE'S JOURNEY:

Colleges and Universities:

Baldwin-Wallace College (Berea, OH) • Bluffton University (Bluffton, OH) • Central College (Pella, IA) • Edgewood College (Madison, WI) • Florida Southern College (Lakeland, FL) • Gustavus Adolphus College (St. Peter, MN) • Henderson State University (Arkadelphia, AR) • Idaho State University (Pocatello, ID) • Indiana University (Kokomo, IN) • University of Missouri (Kansas City, MO) • College of Mount St. Joseph (Cincinnati, OH) • Northern Arizona University (Flagstaff, AZ) • University of North Carolina (Charlotte, NC) • University of North Carolina (Greensboro, NC) • Notre Dame de Namur University (Belmont, CA) • Peace College (Raleigh, NC) • Pennsylvania State University (Harrisburg, PA) • Rockhurst University (Kansas City, MO) • Sonoma State University (Rohnert Park, CA) • Spring Hill College (Mobile, AL) • Valparaiso University (Valparaiso, IN)

High Schools:

Bay Shore High School (Bay Shore, NY) • Burlingame High School (Burlingame, CA) • Challenge Early College High School (Houston, TX) • Hudson High School (Hudson, OH) • La Jolla Country Day School (La Jolla, CA) • Middletown High School (Middletown, NJ) • Putnam County High School (Eatonton, GA) • Santa Ana High School (Santa Ana, CA) • Santa Monica High School (Santa Monica, CA) • St. Ignatius High School (Cleveland, OH) • Upper Cape Cod Regional Technical School (Bourne, MA) • Wheeling High School (Wheeling, IL)

One City, One Book:

Glendale, CA • Laredo, TX • San Diego, CA • Santa Fe Springs, CA • Yuma, AZ

• about this book

Sparked by a conversation with the author's maid, Carmen, about Carmen's separation and reunion with her own son, Minor, *Enrique's Journey* began as a series of articles for the *Los Angeles Times*. After their publication, the articles won two Pulitzer prizes (feature writing for Sonia Nazario and feature photography for Don Bartletti), the George Polk Award for International Reporting, and the Grand Prize of the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards.

Realizing that the immigrant's journey was "the adventure story of the twenty-first century," Sonia Nazario set out to tell a story that is very common—the story of the trek to the United States (xvi). The unique aspect of her treatment, however, is that the immigrant whose story she chooses to tell is only a child, and he is one, Nazario discovered, of "an estimated 48,000 children who enter the United States from Central America and Mexico each year, illegally and without either of their parents" (5). While she was researching the story, Nazario also discovered the many hazards of these children's journeys and the sometimes disappointing outcome of their reunions with their families.

Enrique's Journey tells the true story of a five-year-old boy whose mother leaves him behind in Honduras so that she can seek better fortune in America. Planning only to stay until she can send for her children or return with enough money to support them, Enrique's mother promises to bring him to be with her, but each year setbacks prevent her from keeping her promise. Enrique desperately misses his mother and believes that only she can understand and support him.

After disappointing stays with other relatives, Enrique decides he will go to America to find his mother. With only her phone number on a piece of paper, Enrique sets out on the perilous journey at age 16. His journey means hopping trains to get through Mexico to the United States border. Seven times he fails; each time, though, he learns ways to make it further on the next trip.

After terrible hardships—attacks by gang members, near misses on the train, extreme hunger and thirst—Enrique makes it to his mother, only to find that in the years of separation, his image of her and the reality he finds are very different.

• praise for *Enrique's Journey*

"A stirring and troubling book about a magnificent journey...Joseph Campbell would recognize *Enrique's Journey*. It's the stuff of myth...[but] *Enrique's Journey* is true....A microcosm of the massive exodus pouring over the borders of our nations...Enrique's suffering and bravery become universal, and one cannot fail to be moved by the desperation and sheer strength of spirit that guides these lonely wanderers....*Enrique's Journey* is about love. It's about family. It's about home....The border will continue to trouble the dreams of anyone who is paying attention....*Enrique's Journey* is among the best border books yet written."

— *The Washington Post Book World*

"A meticulously documented account of an epic journey, one undertaken by thousands of children every year...[Nazario] covers both positive and negative effects of immigration, illuminating the problem's complexity....In telling Enrique's story [she] bears witness for us all."

— *San Francisco Chronicle*

"This portrait of poverty and family ties has the potential to reshape American conversations about immigration."

— *Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

"A remarkable feat of 'immersion reporting.'...[Gives] the immigrant...flesh and bone, history and voice...The kind of story we have told ourselves throughout history, a story we still need to hear."

— *Los Angeles Times Book Review*

"This is a harrowing odyssey that depicts one young man's attempts to reunite with his mother and the social and economic issues involved in illegal immigration."

— *Booklist*



• about the author

SONIA NAZARIO has spent twenty years reporting and writing about social issues—most recently as a projects reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*—earning her dozens of national awards. The newspaper series upon which this book is based won the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing, the George Polk Award for International Reporting, and the Grand Prize of the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards. Nazario grew up in Kansas and Argentina. She is a graduate of Williams College and has a master's degree in Latin American studies from the University of California, Berkeley. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband. For more information, visit www.enriquesjourney.com.

• teaching ideas

This text offers a wide range of instructional opportunities in a variety of courses. It is particularly well-suited to those in language arts, social studies, and the social sciences. The text also lends itself to a range of grade levels, beginning as early as middle school and up to college-level coursework. The ideas addressed in the work have depth—inequality, prejudice, parental conflict—but the pure adventure of the story would allow any of these weighty issues to be glossed over in discussions in lower grades. Other mature topics—rape, assault, robbery—while present in the text, do not take place with such detail that they cannot be lightly touched upon or ignored, depending on the teaching context.

This text also lends itself well to addressing the four strands of the language arts curriculum—reading, writing, communication, and research—and to the standards offered by the National Council of Teachers of English (these may be accessed by linking to this site: <http://www.ncte.org/about/over/standards/110846.html>). The activities in this guide offer ideas for these four strands and in these curriculum areas.

Enrique's Journey easily lends itself to a study of immigration in the United States and of the trends in immigration that have formed this “nation of immigrants,” as President George W. Bush has called the country (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/04/20010409-4.html>). Teachers may wish to have their classes trace the historical patterns of immigration to the United States: from mostly northern European in the seventeen and eighteen hundreds, to the addition of Scandinavian countries in the late 1800s, to southern European in the early 1900s, and finally to modern patterns of immigration. Classes might also wish to examine peaks of immigration—Irish, Chinese, Italian, Cuban, etc.—throughout America's history and to examine events that motivated these peaks.

Enrique's Journey fits comfortably within the tradition of investigative journalism that has often forced Americans to examine their beliefs and practices. As Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* forced a closer look at the meat-packing industry in the early 1900s, *Enrique's Journey* shows Americans a side of immigration they might not wish to see and, in the process, presents a set of characters that can only create sympathy for immigrants' plight—and perhaps move its readers to a deeper understanding of and acceptance for the immigrants with whom they might come into contact.

Finally, *Enrique's Journey* holds many parallels to other texts that have become standard parts of many curricula. Enrique's trip is an odyssey, and like *Odysseus*, Enrique's journey may be analyzed as an epic journey. The problems Enrique faces are common problems that many students and their families may have faced, as well; instructors may use these commonalities to generate discussion.

While Enrique's story is a current story—which will allow students to find parallels in daily newspapers and news magazines—it is, ultimately, timeless. *Enrique's Journey* is a story that is essential to the American, and, further, to the human experience.

discussion & writing: comprehension

Prologue—In this section of *Enrique’s Journey*, the author allows readers an inside view of her creative process. Nazario reviews her background as the child of immigrants, her inspiration for writing this story, and the process—both logistical and compositional—that she begins as she prepares to research and write Enrique’s story. The writer tells how and where she finds Enrique and how he is representative of the children whose story she desires to tell.

1. How did the author get the idea for this work?
2. What shift that is a change from the 1980s has taken place in the face of the modern immigrant population?
3. Why has this change in the profile of the typical immigrant taken place?
4. What were some of the preparations the author took before beginning her research for this story?
5. What “safety nets” did the author wish to have in place for her own personal safety? Why were these “safety nets” necessary?
6. How did the maid’s son make the journey to America?
7. What does El Tren de la Muerte mean?

Chapter One—This chapter introduces the characteristics of Enrique that readers will encounter throughout the book—his shyness, his affection for his mother, his inability to understand why his mother leaves him. This chapter also traces Lourdes’ (Enrique’s mother) decision to leave for America and her early experiences in California. In this section of the text, readers see Enrique’s rebellion against the relatives with whom he lives in Honduras and Enrique’s desire to make his own journey to follow his mother.

8. Approximately how many illegal immigrants enter the United States annually?
9. In what Central American country do Lourdes and Enrique live?
10. On what date does Enrique’s mother leave him?
11. Approximately how many children enter the United States each year illegally and without their parents?

12. What is the name of Enrique’s father?
13. What are some of Lourdes’s early jobs in California?
14. Why is becoming a nanny difficult for Lourdes?
15. What is the name of Enrique’s sister?
16. With whom does Enrique’s sister live?
17. Why does Enrique end up leaving his father’s home?
18. How does Lourdes lose most of the money she has saved to try to bring her children to her?
19. What negative habits does Enrique develop in his mother’s absence?
20. How does Enrique feel about living with Uncle Marco?
21. Why does Enrique’s relationship with Marco end?
22. At fifteen, Enrique returns to live with whom?
23. What is the name of Enrique’s girlfriend?
24. Initially, what things does Enrique do to win his girlfriend’s affection?
25. With whom does Enrique first try to head north?
26. How does Enrique’s first attempt end?
27. What event precipitates Enrique’s leaving for “el Norte” for good?
28. On what date does Enrique leave his grandmother’s house to begin his journey?
29. What possessions does Enrique take with him?

Chapter Two—This chapter begins with Enrique’s seventh attempt to reach America. He is battered and bloody. The chapter reviews Enrique’s first six attempts and fills in the details of this attempt that led to Enrique’s injuries. After getting medical treatment, Enrique hitches a ride with a man who turns out to be an off-duty immigration officer. The chapter ends with Enrique being sent back to Honduras.

30. When Enrique is attacked and injured, who helps him?
31. What is the attitude of many Mexicans toward Enrique and other Central Americans?

discussion & writing: comprehension

32. What often is the attitude of the police with whom Enrique has encounters?
33. What is the primary mode of travel for immigrants passing through Mexico?

Chapter Three—Chapter Three describes Enrique's eighth attempt to reach the United States. The chapter focuses on the horrors Enrique faces in Chiapas, Mexico's southernmost state. This chapter introduces the dangers of the trains Enrique must ride to complete his journey. The chapter also introduces Olga Sanchez Martinez, who tries to help those who are injured by accidents on the trains.

34. Describe Chiapas.
35. What dangers does Enrique face on his journey?
36. Why is it not a good idea to sleep on the train?
37. Olga Sanchez Martinez is one of the people along Enrique's route. How is she different from those who try to hurt Enrique?

Chapter Four—In Chapter Four, Enrique enters the Mexican state of Veracruz and encounters many forms of kindness from the people along his route. Some provide clothes; others, food and shelter. Enrique finds a job to get money to continue his journey. He makes it all the way to Nuevo Laredo, a town on the Mexican/American border.

38. What significant change takes place when Enrique reaches Veracruz?
39. How do the people of Veracruz show their kindness?
40. What does Hipolito Reyes Larios see as his mission?
41. When Enrique finally arrives at Nuevo Laredo, he is on the banks of what river?

Chapter Five—Chapter Five tells of Enrique's life, waiting to cross the border into the United States. Enrique has lost his mother's phone number on his trip, so he must make money to call Honduras to get the number from relatives. Enrique also needs money to pay for help in crossing the border safely.

42. How does Enrique make money to buy a phone card?
43. Why must Enrique call Honduras first?
44. Who helps Enrique cross the border into the United States?

Chapter Six—Chapter Six tells the end of Enrique's trek. He enters the United States and reunites with his mother. Chapter Six also continues the story of Enrique's relationship with his girlfriend in Honduras, Maria Isabel. Maria Isabel gives birth to a daughter, but Enrique realizes that he cannot yet bring Maria Isabel or the baby to the U.S.

45. On what day is Enrique finally united with his mother?
46. In what state does Enrique ultimately reunite with his mother?
47. On November 2, 2000, another significant event happens to Enrique. What is it?

Chapter Seven—In Chapter Seven, each character's story continues to unfold. Enrique, having been separated from his mother for eleven years, struggles to accept her advice and discipline. Lourdes continues to struggle financially and in her relationship with her son. Maria Isabel, separated from the father of her baby, struggles to rear the child and to assure the baby that her father in America will someday return or send for them. The chapter ends as Maria Isabel, four years after Enrique left Honduras, leaves herself to try to find a better life for her child.

48. Once reunited, how do Enrique and his mother get along?
49. How does Enrique's relationship with Maria Isabel progress?
50. What conflicts arise between Maria Isabel and Enrique's family?
51. How does the book end as it began?

discussion & writing: discussion

Prologue

1. Examine the author's background. What about that background gives her empathy for her characters?
2. Examine the author's writing process as described in the text. What evidence do you see of the pre-composing and prewriting process?
3. Discuss the shift in immigration from the 1980s to the present. What economic and political factors might account for the shift? How does this shift impact people's attitudes about immigration? How does this shift impact the dangers of the immigrant journey?
4. What predictions can you make as you read?
5. The author says that immigration is "a powerful stream, one that can only be addressed at its source." What is the meaning of this statement?

Chapter One

1. Discuss Enrique's relationship with his mother. How is that relationship different from the relationships each has with other people?
2. What does the author mean when she says that for these children, finding their mothers "becomes the quest for the Holy Grail"?
3. Contrast the images of the United States that Lourdes/Enrique see on television versus what each finds in the United States.
4. In this section, the seeds of Enrique's desire to follow his mother are planted. What "seeds" can you find?

Chapter Two

1. Contrast the descriptions of the first attack Enrique endures on his journey with the first kindnesses he is shown.
2. Discuss the attitudes toward immigrants and immigration Lourdes and Enrique encounter in Honduras, Mexico, and the United States. Do those attitudes differ even within different parts of each country?
3. Summarize Enrique's early attempts. Why does each fail?

Chapter Three

1. Describe Chiapas. How is it different from other places Enrique travels?
2. Trace the different names given to the train. What does each name reveal about the journey?
3. The gangs aboard the trains are portrayed in both a positive and negative light. How?
4. How is Oaxaca different?

Chapter Four

1. What is the significance of the statue of Jesus Enrique encounters?
2. How does the journey change at the point of this encounter?

Chapters Five & Six

1. Contrast the sides of the Rio Grande. What is Enrique's life like on his side of the river that in Mexico is called Rio Bravo?
2. Describe Enrique's final journey into the United States.
3. What problems develop almost immediately when Enrique is reunited with his mother? Do these problems surprise you?

Chapter Seven

1. What motivates Enrique to stay in the United States? What things make him wish to return to Honduras?
2. What factors cause conflict between Enrique and Lourdes? How do they seek to overcome these factors?
3. Contrast Enrique's life in the United States with the life he left behind.
4. How do you feel when Maria Isabel leaves Honduras?

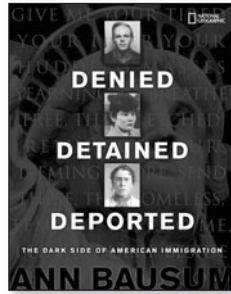
• suggested activities

1. Trace Enrique's journey from Honduras to North Carolina. On a map, mark the places of significance to this story.
2. Examine the use of figurative language to describe the train in section three. Descriptions include "The Iron Worm," "The Train of Death," "The Pilgrim's Train," "The Iron Horse," and "The Train that Devours." How do these different descriptions allow for different attitudes toward the journey?
3. Interview someone who came to the United States from another country or even someone who came from another place within the U.S. to your town. What obstacles did they encounter? What changes did they see? What do they miss about their former home? What do they like about their new home?
4. Examine family relationships. Create a family tree for Enrique and for yourself. Write an essay in which you compare/contrast two of your relatives or two of Enrique's relatives (his uncles, his parents or grandparents, for example). Do you have one parent who is more lenient or more demanding?
5. Examine current newspapers or magazines for articles concerning immigration. What issues need resolution? What varying opinions exist?
6. Examine the changes in Enrique's character. Construct a character chart in which you show the ways in which he changes throughout the text.
7. Research a Central American country. Profile its political, economic, and social structure in a presentation for your class.
8. Create a plot map of *Enrique's Journey*. Separate the plot events for each central character. Where do these maps intersect?
9. Choose one of the stops Enrique makes to analyze as setting. How does this stop reflect the theme of the text? Make a drawing of this setting to demonstrate its significance to the plot.
10. Begin a class project to assist immigrant charities in your community.

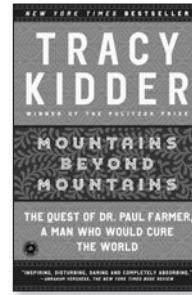
• beyond the book

1. Read and compare *Enrique's Journey* to other stories that trace a character's odyssey. Possible texts include Homer's *The Odyssey*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and stories such as *Journey* by Patricia MacLachlan (middle school). Also compare *Enrique's Journey* to stories of the immigrant experience—Howard Fast's *The Immigrants*, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, and *Kaffir Boy* by Mark Mathabane are possible texts.
2. Examine the history of immigration in the United States. Topics can include tracing immigration patterns through American history, tracing the journey of a particular immigrant population, and examining the contributions of immigrants to American history.
3. Viewing movies that show the immigrant experience can provide enrichment. Popular films such as *Titanic*, *Gangs of New York*, or even *Men in Black* (a very different kind of immigrant) can allow students to examine the immigrant experience. Other more serious films may also be available to you.
4. Trace your own immigrant experience. Use *Enrique's Journey* as a springboard to finding out how and when your own family came to the United States.
5. Examine *Enrique's Journey* as part of the tradition of American investigative journalism. Upton Sinclair said that he "aimed for America's heart and hit its stomach" with *The Jungle*. Are the texts similar in their view and treatment of the subject of immigration? What actions do you believe Sonia Nazario wishes to inspire in her readers?

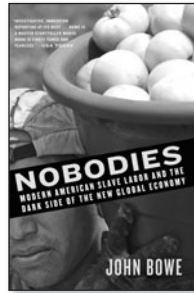
• for further reading



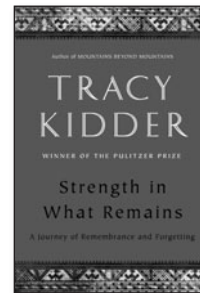
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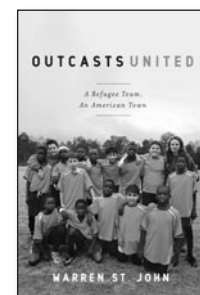
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The Immigration History Research Center:

www.ihrc.umn.edu

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Teacher/Student Resources:

<http://uscis.gov/graphics/aboutus/history/teacher/Resources.html>

Ellis Island:

www.ellisland.org

www.historychannel.com/ellisland/index2.htm

www.nps.gov/elis

• about this guide's writer

David Corley teaches high school English in South Carolina. His experience is with many different levels of students in grades 9-12. He has also taught courses for adult education, college, and graduate-level students.