



Book Review: *Migrant: The Journey of a Mexican Worker*  
 Written by José Manuel Mateo. Illustrated by Javier Martínez Pedro.  
 Translated from Spanish by Emily Smith  
 Harry M. Abrams, 2014, 22 pp.  
 ISBN: 9781419709579

*I was afraid that they would catch us, because if they capture you, then you disappear. (np)*

The political issues of migration are addressed in unlikely way in the captivating picture book, *Migrant: The Journey of a Mexican Worker*. Told from the perspective of a young boy whose father has crossed the border into the U.S. to look for work, readers are drawn into the journey the boy and his family take to find the patriarch of the family. The harrowing experiences, the hope, and eventually the home the family makes will create discussion and debate, but there is no denying the beauty of this book.

The story literally unfolds in one continuous illustration—a codex—that shows the journey with brief narration in English on one side and Spanish on the other. The intricate drawings not only pay homage to the amate (tree bark) material used for writing in ancient Mesoamerica; the codex style of historical writing and pictographs found in Mexico and parts of Central and South America are also honored through this accordion-style book that is read from top to bottom. This book will be poured over by artists young and old, and the story itself is a brief account of survival and hope that is possible if one can make it across the border. From the cover to the author’s historical note, this book is a gift. It is a truly remarkable piece of work that will especially delight those who find great interest in illustration.

There are numerous ways to pair this book with other texts about immigration that will flesh out the experience. Books such as *Grab Hands and Run* (Temple, 1995), *Tonight, By Sea* (Temple, 1997), *Before We Were Free* (Alvarez, 2004) and *First Crossing: Stories about Teen Immigrants* (Gallo, 2007) will give a sense of why young people chance immigration without documentation. In addition, *Migrant* would pair well with *The London Jungle Book* (Shyam, 2014) and *Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit* (Das, 2014), which also reflect unique illustration styles. This is a great book to add to a collection of illustration styles in picture books.

Jose Manuel Mateo is a Mexican writer and poet who has written a number of Spanish-language children’s books. He notes that he has not had such an experience, but the illustrator, Javier Martinez Pedro, actually migrated to the U.S. without documentation one time, and thus the drawings reflect his first-hand knowledge of the trip so many have taken from Mexico and points further south.

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