



*Between Us and Abuela: A Family Story from the Border*

Written by Mitali Perkins

Illustrated by Sara Palacios

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After a year, María, Juan, and their mother are finally getting to visit Abuela. It's been a long time, so María hopes she can still be Abuela's angelita. The family takes a bus to Friendship Park in San Diego and after a long walk, they see "two high, strong fences along the border, reaching deep into the sea." They wait, finally hearing Abuela's voice, "Estoy aquí." They can't hug her, but they can touch

fingers. Despite the strong fences, families in San Diego and Tijuana laugh, cry, and pray together. The thirty minutes goes too fast and when María is about to give Abuela a handmade scarf and a hand-drawn picture, a patrol officer states, "We can't let anything through the fence." María doesn't give up and finds a way to send the gifts over the fence into Abuela's arms.

*Between Us and Abuela* is based on the religious festival, La Posada Sin Fronteras (The Inn Without Borders), celebrated since 1993 between San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico, to remember the night the Holy Family searched for shelter before the birth of Jesús. The story, told from María's perspective, gives young readers access to a complex, unjust, and heartbreaking experience. The written text and the illustrations offer multiple opportunities for deep conversations and critical inquiries. For example, Juan's drawing is labeled, "Inns. No rume," offering a multimodal message about immigration and refugees. María's solution to build a kite to fly both gifts over the border invites dialogue on the role of children's agency in the search for humanity and justice. The border patrol officer who encourages María to fly her kite inspires readers to question and challenge how the officer is represented. The open-ended "We can't see through the fences, but I picture Abuela scurrying across the beach" creates space to imagine life beyond the book.

The digital illustrations allow the reader to see the high fences between the children and Abuela and between so many other families. Readers may want to compare the illustrations with actual photographs of the wall. The illustrations also convey movement and a sense of urgency, particularly on the double-spread page divided by three horizontal panels, showing María's attempts to fly the kite.

*Between Us and Abuela* can be paired with other books about the US/Mexico border such as *La Frontera: El viaje con Papá/ My Journey with Papá*, by Deborah Mills (2018) and *Dreamers* by Yuyi Morales (2018). The book can also be paired with other stories addressing physical divides like fences, such as *The Other Side* by Jackie Woodson and E.B. Lewis (2001), or walls, such as *The Wall in the Middle of the Book* by John Agee (2018).

Mitali Perkin was born in Kolkata, India and immigrated with her family to the US as a child. Her research on posadas, and particularly on La Posada Sin Fronteras is included as part of the Author's Note. This is her first picturebook. Readers can explore her novels on [www.mitaliperkins.com](http://www.mitaliperkins.com).

Illustrator Sara Palacios was born in Mexico. She was a 2012 Pura Belpré honored illustrator for *Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match/Marisol McDonald no combina* (Monica Brown, 2011). Her illustrations and sketches can be found on [www.sarapalaciosillustrations.com](http://www.sarapalaciosillustrations.com).

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