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# Somos Como Las Nubes / We Are Like The Clouds



## Synopsis

Why are young people leaving their country to walk to the United States to seek a new, safe home? Over 100,000 such children have left Central America. This book of poetry helps us to understand why and what it is like to be them. This powerful book by award-winning Salvadoran poet Jorge Argueta describes the terrible process that leads young people to undertake the extreme hardships and risks involved in the journey to what they hope will be a new life of safety and opportunity. A refugee from El Salvador who fled his war in the eighties, Argueta was born to explain the tragic choice confronting young Central Americans today who are saying goodbye to everything they know because they fear for their lives. This book brings home their situation and will help young people who are living in safety to understand those who are not. Compelling, timely and eloquent, this book is beautifully illustrated by master artist Alfonso Ruano who also illustrated *The Composition*, considered one of the 100 Greatest Books for Kids by Scholastic's Parent and Child Magazine.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 7 - 12 years

Grade Level: 1 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Graciela Argueta likens the spirit of refugee and immigrant children from Central America and Mexico to the movement of clouds in this collection of bilingual poetry. Some of these poems successfully evoke the fear and anxiety generated by this exodus from violence and

privation. The portrayal of the tattooed Salvadoran gangs in "El barrio la campanera" is particularly visceral. But most of the poems skirt the edge of urgency, creating an emotional disconnect. Apprehension by the U.S. border patrol is a dreaded terror refugees pray to avoid. But the poem "Nos presentamos a la patrulla" ("We Introduce Ourselves to the Border Patrol") couches the nightmare in terms of an innocuous meet-and-greet. In an introductory poem, "Mi barrio," the author describes a rooster eating a Popsicle ("paleta"), but Ruano features the rooster with a lollipop— the alternate definition of the word. This misinterpretation disrupts the cyclical nature of the Popsicle motif carried forth into the concluding poem. Furthermore, the brutal march across the Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts claims countless lives every year, but the image depicted implies that the crossing is nothing more onerous than a day hike. VERDICT Despite flaws, this is a much-needed jumping-off point for elementary classroom discussions of refugees and immigration. — Mary Margaret Mercado, Pima County Public Library, Tucson, AZ

Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award  
 USBBY's Outstanding International Books List  
 ALA Notable Children's Books  
 Cooperative Children's Book Center Choices  
 Américas Award  
 Commended Title  
 A Bank Street College of Education Best Children's Book of the Year/strong>"With tenderness and humanity, this bilingual book describes the hopes, fears, and uncertainties of the thousands of displaced children that arrive every year at the southern border of the United States . . . Poignant, heartbreaking, and sadly, timely." — Kirkus, starred review  
 "Argueta and Ruano present a unique and much-needed perspective on the reasons driving young people to immigrate to the U.S. — extremely vital." — Booklist, starred review  
 "A much-needed jumping-off point for elementary classroom discussions of refugees and immigration." — School Library Journal  
 "The poems are vivid and accessible, and Ruano's earth-toned acrylic illustrations show people on the move who are both fragile and strong at the same time." — Julie Danielson, Kirkus Reviews  
 "Delicately illustrated and painstakingly presented, *Somos como las nubes/ We are Like the Clouds* is highly recommended, compassionate reading." — Midwest Book Review

This is a lovely book!

*Somos Como Las Nubes/ We are Like the Clouds* is a moving collection of bilingual free verse poems. This is one of the few books that I have encountered about the heartbreaking experiences of children who leave their homes to embark on their journey to the United States. This collection of poetry begins with poetry depicting the experiences and sights of the children —

home countries. The poetry then shifts to the journey that children take to get to the United States. The author includes poems that describe the fears of traveling on La Bestia (a fast moving moving train that many migrants use to travel), discuss being accompanied by coyotes, and describe children's feelings as they cross the deserts. I'll share one of the most powerful poems about the journey titled "Las Chinamas". The word Chinamas refers to the border between El Salvador and Guatemala. When we crossed the border at Las Chinamas I saw the river Paz. Its water runs smiling between the rocks. Here the cenzontles (mockingbirds) never stop singing. I remembered our schoolyard, the gualcalchillas, (small songbirds) and my teacher Miss Celia. I remembered my mother, my brothers, my sisters. Who knows when I will see them again. I look at the sky and think, we are like the clouds. What I loved about this book is that there is message of hope in knowing that children are resilient, but the author does not hold back in depicting the heartbreak that goes along with leaving a home country. The book allows the reader to experience the treacherous journey to the United States through the eyes and wonder of a child. The pictures in this book are also stunningly beautiful. The pictures depict the children's home countries, families crossing borders, and children laying on the soft sand in the desert. The final poems in the book offer hope. In the poem "Fear" a mother tells her child in his dream, "This is not a dream, you are in my arms." The child has arrived to his destination in Los Angeles. I shed tears when I read this book. It is heartbreaking and it is a poignant reminder that children are children and that there are difficult decisions that children should not have to make. In my opinion, what makes this book even more powerful is that it is written by Jorge Argueta. The author's note at the beginning of the book shares Jorge's own experience of fleeing El Salvador and coming to the United States. He shares his inspiration for writing the book by stating, "Like the clouds, our children come and go. Nothing and no one can stop them."

This stunning book of poetry looks at the flood of children from Central America who are making their way to the United States. 100,000 of them have walked to our country, escaping to safety and what they hope is fresh opportunities. The book opens with a few poems that show the beauty of Central America and then swiftly moves to the problems and the gangs that are in control. Then begins the long march north, the trust placed in coyotes that lead them, the dangers they face, the rough conditions and the courage it takes to head towards the unknown. The book ends with poems of Los Angeles and hope. Written by a Salvadoran poet, this book's poetry soars

and lifts even when speaking of dark and dangerous subjects. Throughout there is a focus on hope and the distant wonder of the United States. There are poems of the journey that are aching with loss. There are poems of strong parents who carry children and others of the children alone and fearful. It is a book that captures the range of immigrants coming to the United States, particularly children from Central America whose story is shared with such poignancy on these pages. The art by Ruano is startling and beautiful. He has surreal moments in the art that capture a little touch of playfulness at first. That moves quickly to sense of isolation at times, of being alone in a stark landscape. Towards the end, there is one painting of a child afloat in the air on a blue, cloud-like sleeping bag who is finally heading home with his parents. It is a picture of such tenderness and captures the youth and dreams of these children. An important book that shows the plight of Central American children as they walk to the United States, this is a challenging book of poetry that demands attention. Appropriate for ages 8-12.

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