

A GUIDE TO Lupita Mañana

Patricia Beatty

Salvador shook his head slowly from side to side. “Lupita, you know nothing. . . . I must tell you that it is very difficult to cross over into the United States. . . . We are not going to be welcome. . . . [We] will be breaking the law. . . . Now tell me that mañana will be better, Lupita.”

THE NOVEL AT A GLANCE

Lupita Mañana is a contemporary novel addressing the issue of illegal immigration.

Setting: The present, Mexico and southern California.

Protagonist: Lupita Torres, a thirteen-year-old Mexican girl who travels with her brother to find work in the United States after their father dies.

Conflicts: The plot of the novel revolves around several important external conflicts: the conflict between Lupita’s family and their impoverished circumstances; the conflict between two cultures, languages, and value systems; the conflict between U.S. immigration laws and illegal immigrants like Lupita and her brother; and the conflict between illegal immigrants and those who profit from their difficult circumstances. In dealing with these conflicts, Lupita also must try to balance her yearning for home and its old ways with her recognition that she must harden herself to survive in her new surroundings.

Resolution: Lupita and Salvador reach their destination in California, but Salvador is caught by the immigration authorities and sent back to Mexico. Lupita stays and continues to work and send money back to her family. She resolves to learn English in order to make a better life for herself.

Themes: People will struggle to find a better life; the loss of basic cultural values often undermines an individual; laws are not always humane or fair; growing up is not easy, particularly for an outsider.

Of Special Note: The novel offers a compelling presentation of one side of the currently controversial issue of illegal immigration.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

The novel should pose no problems for students reading at the middle school level. Since the novel focuses on the

vantage point of Mexican characters, the term *gringo* is commonly applied to non-Mexican Americans. There are disapproving references to drinking and to smoking marijuana. The main themes of the novel reinforce the importance of traditional family and cultural values.

BACKGROUND

U.S. Immigration Laws. The Immigration Act of 1990 limited the number of nonrefugee immigrants to 675,000 per year. This number was to be divided among these categories: “family immigrants” (immediate family members of U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents); “employment-based immigrants” (this category included unskilled workers, whose numbers were limited to 10,000 per year); and “diversity immigrants” from countries that have not made up a large proportion of the immigrant pool). In the Afterword to the novel, the director of an immigrants’ rights project discusses a variety of issues related to immigration.

Day of the Three Kings. January 6 is the Epiphany, the Christian feast celebrating the arrival of the three Magi (wise men or kings) at Jesus’ birthplace in Bethlehem. In many countries, people exchange gifts on this day, not on Christmas.

The Route from Ensenada to Indio. In the novel, the children walk from Ensenada, a coastal city on the Baja Peninsula (south of California), about 100 miles north to Tijuana; they ride by truck and then by train about 120 miles north to Los Angeles and another 55 miles east to Colton; and they walk 60 miles southeast to Indio, for a total of about 335 miles.

MAIN CHARACTERS (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

Lupita Torres, an optimistic, trusting thirteen-year-old Mexican girl whose impoverished, widowed mother sends her north to California to live with an aunt, to find work, and to send a portion of her earnings back to Mexico to help support the family.

Carmela Torres, Lupita's mother, who supports her five children as a hotel maid; she is widowed when her husband is swept off a fishing boat.

Salvador Torres, Lupita's restless, proud fifteen-year-old brother, who accompanies her to the United States; loves and supports his family but is also easily influenced by fun-seeking friends.

Tomas, a "coyote"—a shady character who charges huge amounts of money for slipping illegal immigrants across the border.

Rodrigo Esposito, a Mexican American in Colton, California, who employs Lupita and Salvador, along with other illegal immigrants.

Concha, one of the maids at Esposito's hotel; shares a room with Lupita.

Consuelo Ruiz, Lupita and Salvador's long-suffering aunt, who lives with her indolent husband in Indio, California; she has led her relatives in Mexico to believe she is rich and successful.

Catarina Ruiz, Consuelo's eleven-year-old daughter; acts superior to Lupita.

Hermilio Ruiz, Consuelo's indolent husband; spends most of his time socializing while his wife does back-breaking work in the fields.

Elvio Ruiz, Consuelo's thirteen-year-old son; like Catarina, condescending toward Lupita.

Irela Ruiz, Consuelo's eight-year-old daughter; a kindred spirit to Lupita and the only cousin who shows her real kindness.

Fidencio Ruiz, Hermilio's helpful older brother; finds fieldwork for his sister-in-law and Lupita and Salvador.

Lucio Ruiz (Lucky), Fidencio's grandson; has a bad influence on Salvador.

PLOT

Chapter 1. We meet the central **character**, Lupita Torres, a thirteen-year-old girl who lives in Ensenada, Mexico, and is nicknamed "Lupita Mañana" because she always hopes for a better tomorrow. Her capacity for hope introduces the **theme** of the search for a better life. We are also introduced to the first of the novel's **conflicts**: Lupita's fisherman father has just drowned in a storm at sea, leaving Lupita's mother, a hotel chambermaid, and her five children poorer than ever. We also meet the novel's other main **character**, Lupita's brother, Salvador, who at fifteen is now the head of the family.

Chapter 2. The next day Salvador plans to ask Captain Ortega if he can take his father's place on the boat; Salvador also needs to claim his father's remaining wages. But Ortega disapproves of his daughter's romance with Salvador, who soon quarrels with Ortega and stomps off the boat. When Ortega tosses Mr. Torres's wages after Salvador, Lupita scoops the money

up. An important **complication** is introduced: Lupita learns that her mother wants her and Salvador to go north to work in the United States and live with their Aunt Consuelo, who is married to an American citizen in California. Salvador recognizes that he and Lupita, as illegal immigrants, won't be welcome, **foreshadowing** the trouble they will face later on, as well as the novel's central **conflict**.

Chapter 3. After a tearful farewell, Lupita and Salvador set off on their long walk north, leaving a familiar **setting** for an unfamiliar one. They have food and some money, which has been sewn into Salvador's coat; for safety Lupita is disguised as a boy.

Chapter 4. The next day, Lupita and Salvador reach Tijuana, a new **setting**. Salvador is drawn into conversation with a shopkeeper, who introduces them to his cousin Tomas. They don't trust Tomas, who is a "coyote"—someone who takes huge fees from would-be immigrants, promising to guide them across the border. Here the **conflict** between illegal immigrants and those who exploit them is introduced. Salvador decides to spy on Tomas and so reach the border without having to pay.

Chapter 5. Salvador's plan works up to a point. He and Lupita hide in Tomas's truck and then follow him on foot to the border. In a dangerous **complication**, however, Tomas's group of immigrants are attacked by American border bandits, who kill an old man. Tomas, who has already taken his fees, runs away. Bravely Lupita and Salvador help fight the bandits. Soon after, border police arrive and arrest all the male immigrants, allowing the women and children, including Lupita and Salvador, to return to Mexico.

Chapter 6. Back in Tijuana, money almost gone, Lupita hides each day as Salvador looks for work. After a week, he runs into Bartolo, an acquaintance from Ensenada, who offers to get them across the border in return for their father's crucifix and Salvador's knife. This time, the children hide in a vegetable truck, jumping out once they cross the border. They are now somewhere south of Los Angeles and have no idea how to reach Indio, where their aunt lives. Rosario, another illegal immigrant, helps them hide in a freight car. Before the train leaves, border police arrest Rosario and his family; Lupita and Salvador manage to stay hidden.

Chapter 7. Lupita and Salvador ride the train; when it stops, they meet Hector Esposito, a friendly *pocho*, or Mexican American, who tells them they are in Colton, California. He warns them that because they cannot speak English, they will be targeted as illegals by *la migra*, immigration authorities, **foreshadowing** the **conflicts** they will experience in the United States. He introduces them to his brother, Rodrigo, who gives them work: Salvador as a dishwasher in his cafe and Lupita, who has dropped her boy disguise, as a maid in his cousin's motel. They must pay for forged papers and rent; still, they have some money left to send home. Lupita finds the

work hard but settles into a routine. Her roommate, Concha, another illegal immigrant, helps her become acclimated, stressing the need to learn English. But their orderly life is soon disrupted by another **complication**: The authorities come looking for illegal immigrants.

Chapter 8. Lupita and Salvador manage to elude *la migra*, but some of their new friends aren't so lucky. Salvador decides that they must leave their jobs and head immediately to Indio, sixty miles away. They travel on foot at night to avoid the police. During the third night, Americans in a truck stalk them with guns but then give up their game.

Chapter 9. Lupita and Salvador finally reach Indio, where they are stunned to find their aunt's house in a poor neighborhood, for Consuelo had always led them to believe she was wealthy. A worn-down woman, their aunt says she had written to tell their mother not to send them to Indio, and she sadly admits that she has been lying about her status. Consuelo's life develops the **conflict** with poverty: She has five children of her own, two close to Lupita's age, and a husband, Hermilio, who spends his time either coughing or carousing. When Hermilio finally appears, the couple decide that their niece and nephew can stay if they find jobs and pay rent.

Chapter 10. Lupita and Salvador meet their cousins; Elvio and Catarina act superior to the two "wetbacks"; however, serious eight-year-old Irela seems different. Consuelo tells Lupita and Salvador that her husband's brother, Fidencio, will find them fieldwork but at lower wages than they earned in Colton. The work—picking squash—is miserable and backbreaking, underlining the **conflict** with poverty; Salvador is very bitter. The two children decide to gloss over their sad situation when they send a letter and money to their mother.

Chapter 11. Lupita buys a dress and goes to church on Sunday. Meanwhile, Salvador meets Fidencio's grandson, a glib, stylish boy named Lucio, who plays guitar and calls himself "Lucky." Lucky takes Salvador under his wing, offers to get him fashionable clothes, and tells him to leave the fieldwork to children and old people.

Chapter 12. Lucky gets Salvador a job in a cafe; Salvador decides to move in with Lucky and his friends, who introduce him to marijuana. His new life develops the **conflict** between value systems, and also the **theme** of how someone's character can be undermined when values disintegrate. After Salvador moves out, Lupita sees him only rarely; he contributes less money to send to their mother. On January 6, the traditional gift-giving feast of the Epiphany, Lupita is stunned to receive a beautiful velveteen dress from her aunt. Lupita tells Consuelo she has not written her mother about Consuelo's hard life, and her aunt is grateful.

Chapter 13. Salvador's new life is eating up more of his time and money. At their aunt's insistence, he grudgingly agrees to bring a date for Lupita for the Valentine's Day party. On the night of the party, Lupita is excited

about wearing her new velveteen dress, but Salvador seems to resent being seen with her. He leaves her with his friend Rafael, who sullenly dances with her. Hurt, Lupita escapes to the ladies' room to cry. On her way back to the party, she hears cries of "*La migra!*" and runs back to the ladies' room. She slides out the window and hides in the bushes, where she overhears Lucky telling Rafael that the authorities have taken Salvador. As they laughingly speculate about Lupita's probable arrest, she confronts and denounces them. Lucky drives her back to her aunt, who tells her that Salvador will be sent back to Tijuana. Lupita promises her aunt that she will continue to live with her and work in the fields. When Consuelo explains that illegal immigrants are usually betrayed by their lack of English, Lupita decides she must learn English. That night Lupita is depressed by her **internal conflict**: Homesick and lonely, she realizes that she must "make a shell so she would not be hurt so much." Lupita is startled when Irela shows up with a book and a flashlight. As Irela starts to teach her English, Lupita begins to hope again that her tomorrow will be better, underlining the **theme** that people are often inspired to strive for a better future.

APPROACHES FOR POST-READING ACTIVITIES

The outstanding element of this novel is **conflict**. Most of the characters experience external and internal conflict because of their social and economic status. Discussion groups or students doing individual research projects might focus on the following activities.

1. Exploring the Issues of the Novel

Students will probably be most interested in the problems that face illegal immigrants. What is life really like for illegal immigrants in this country? How just are the immigration laws? These questions could open up several ways of exploring this issue:

- doing research on the illegal immigrant population
- debating the fairness of the current immigration laws
- reading a firsthand nonfiction account of an immigrant's experience in the United States

2. Evaluating Credibility and Relevance

Discussion groups might focus on other specific elements of the novel:

- How believable are the characters and their actions? Which characters seem most sympathetic and why?
- Which incidents in the plot were most memorable? Did any seem farfetched?
- What will happen after the novel's resolution?
- How do the novel's conflicts connect with issues in today's news stories, movies, or TV dramas?

3. Extending the Novel

Discussion groups might extend ideas in the novel:

- How are traditional Mexican values, as portrayed in the novel, similar to and different from students' own values?

- How might people who have gone through experiences like Lupita's be affected by that experience?
- How would students' daily lives be different if they were illegal immigrants?

MEET THE WRITER

Patricia Beatty (1922–1991) was born in Portland, Oregon, and spent much time as a child in Coast Guard stations on American Indian reservations in the northwest United States, where she became interested in American Indian life. She once attributed her writing career to a long childhood illness, suggesting that many writers who write for young readers have known pain or loneliness in childhood and so can empathize with others' suffering. Beatty believed that the ability to get into someone else's skin and to think and act like that person is what it means to be a good writer. She studied literature in college and later taught English and history. She married John Louis Beatty, who became a history professor, and later collaborated with him on a number of historical novels. The contemporary setting of *Lupita Mañana*, which was a Jane Addams Children's Book Award honor book, represents a departure from her usual focus on historical periods.

READ ON

Patricia Beatty, *Turn Homeward, Hannalee*. A historical novel. Twelve-year-old Hannalee relocates from Georgia to Indiana during the Civil War and is separated from her mother. It has a sequel, *Be Ever Hopeful, Hannalee*.

S. Beth Atkin, *Voices from the Fields*. Nonfiction, poetry, and photographs. The author interviews children of Mexican migrant workers and includes their poetry as well as photographs of them in this collection.

Paula G. Paul, *Last Summer I Got in Trouble*. Novel. A boy vacationing in Texas lies about his driving skills and creates risks for his new friend, an illegal alien.

Frances Temple, *Grab Hands and Run*. Novel. A twelve-year-old boy travels with his mother and sister from El Salvador to Canada.

Julia Alvarez, "Names/Nombres." In this autobiographical account, Alvarez, who spent much of her childhood in the Dominican Republic before returning to New York City, describes what it is like to live in two cultures.

Janet Bode, "Coming to America" from *New Kids on the Block: Oral Histories of Immigrant Teens*. Two teenagers offer firsthand accounts of their journeys to the United States and explain how they have adjusted to their new lives.

Judith Ortiz Cofer, "One More Lesson," from *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*. In her autobiography, Cofer writes about moving from Puerto Rico to New Jersey, where she had to learn a new language and get used to new rules and customs.

Lensey Namioka, "The All-American Slurp." A funny short story about the experiences of a young Chinese American girl and her family.

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