

Artist Statement

Tyler Horn

Connie Podleski

The Difficulty in Decision Making

The choice to come to the United States is one that millions of people make every year, both legally and illegally. The majority of people who fall into this category are from Mexico and Central America. Our project focuses on the difficult choices made by immigrants during their journey to the United States. It is not an easy one, yet millions take the journey every year to attempt to have a better life.

Illegal immigrants represent a large portion of our society and are a major issue of debate today. In 2009, of the 305.5 million people living in the United States; there were approximately 11.2 million undocumented migrants (U.S. News Staff). One in every 10 unauthorized immigrants in 2009 was from Central America (Terrazas). Migrants from Mexico and Central America make up approximately 70% of the 11.2 million, or 7.84 (Germano). In 2009, about 3.67% of the population was illegally residing in the United States.

The human condition has been a subject of great interest throughout history. Understanding where people come from and why people do the things they do is a subject of interest for both of us. Our project is designed to put the reader in the shoes of a migrant from Central America. We want the reader to make the tough decisions that a migrant would make on their journey to the United States. We have read many different stories of migrants who made their journey to the United States, then we compiled them into one choose-your-own-adventure book that encompasses many of the common choices that those migrants had to make.

Deciding on a Story

By Connie Podleski

I decided to write the 'choose-your-own-adventure' book because I thought it was the best way to help the reader experience what a migrant might go through. I wanted to show all the plights migrants have to face in the story. I wanted there to be a number of choices that any one migrant might have to make. It is never easy to understand why people make the choices they do. It is not easy to understand someone's reasons for acting; it is hard to know where someone is coming from. However, how can anyone understand unless they were there? I wanted to try to put the reader in that situation.

Making choices as an immigrant is not always straight forward. Sometimes what may seem like the right choice ends with terrible consequences. It is especially difficult when there are so many people out there in the world trying to take advantage of them. I wanted the book to capture the nature of the struggles migrants have to face. I used a variety of sources to compile the fictitious journey based on truth. Many of the details I use are from the personal account of one migrant or another. I selected a few of the main problems a migrant faces in order convey the difficulty of their decisions. In the following paragraphs I will discuss the reason why I picked certain topics.

The first series of choices I wanted the reader to experience were the choices about leaving. When immigrants leave their home countries they initially fear leaving behind important aspects of their culture and who they are as an individual (Hunter). I wanted the reader to understand all the things that went into finally making the difficult decision to leave everything behind and head for America. I tried to put the reader in the shoes of this young man and his struggles just to make it through the day. It is by no means a simple road to that choice. So many things happen in order to lead to that direction despite his best efforts.

Even when some people stay, things do not turn out as planned. I chose the story of Dia, a Colombian from *To Plead Our Own Cause*, to influence the story about staying with the guerilla army. She was only 15 when she went to the army for help. Once there, she was she had to face up to the situation and carry on the organization. They would not let her leave even though she wanted too. She ended up stuck with them because she chose to stay in her rough situation. There were constant threats of death from commanders as well as in battle. Staying is not always the best option.

One of the bigger choices, even though it seems to be such a small part of the book, is the choice to migrate legally or illegally. The promise of a job due to the willingness of employers to hire migrants coupled with the idea migrants have that leaving is better than staying are powerful forces for crossing the border – legally or not, according to Jeffrey Kaye. People often claim they do not understand why anyone would choose the dangers of traveling to another country illegally rather than navigate the legal channels. It is because too many people are desperate to enter the country, and the law permits too few to enter legally (Hunter). The problem is that, more often than not, illegal immigration is the fastest option. Legal immigration is a very long and tedious process. A majority of people are in such dire situations that they cannot afford to wait and must risk their lives to escape.

I also wanted the reader to understand the frustrations of deportation. There are a great number of paths that send the viewer right back to the beginning of the journey—one wrong turn and they have to start all over again. In the book *Enrique's Journey*, Enrique begins his journey at least eight times. I used his tales of starting over again to influence that various choices that lead to deportation. Immigrants are very resilient, though, when it comes to being deported. Enrique tried and tried again until he made it. Another immigrant named Jorge recounts that, “I don’t give up easily, though. After a few days of rest, I tried again. This time I made it, and here I am (Hunter)!”

Another story I found helpful was about a man named Jesus. On his first attempt to enter the United States he was caught by the border patrol and deported (Kaye). He did not let that attempt get him down. He tried again and made it to Los Angeles where he worked for 19 years before returning home to serve as Mayor (Kaye). His story influenced the path where the reader can choose to return home to his family. It is not an ending in the United States but it is still a good, and plausible, one. Many immigrants leave with intentions of returning home, but that is not always the case. Only one ending is this book leads the main character back home. It is a much safer, easier journey on the way back.

Along the journey in this story, the reader is set-up to encounter a number of people smugglers, also known as coyotes. According to a number of reports, 90-95 % of immigrants from Mexico choose to hire smugglers to help them enter the United States illegally (Corcoran, Kaye, *People Smugglers*, *People-smuggling*, Walser). The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas reported, “Migrants are more likely to hire *coyotes* [Mexican smugglers] when they perceive a higher chance of apprehension were they to attempt a crossing of their own. If coyotes are more in demand or if risks increase, as is the case when criminal penalties on smuggling are increased, then we expect coyote use and prices to rise.” I tried to include a variety of characters to show that picking a bad or a good smuggler is not always clear cut. After all, not every bad guy in the word has shifty eyes and a handlebar mustache. The immigrants making these journeys are willing to do whatever it takes to get them to their destination.

The problem is that some smugglers are doing their best to take advantage of that willingness. Smugglers may seem to be useful to make travel easier but effectively they are looking out for themselves and they are not afraid to leave people behind (Walser). Smuggling has not only a monetary risk but immigrants are also risking their lives with complete strangers. In the article *People Smugglers Inc.* by Tim Padgett I found the story of Gonzalo. He was a Guatemalan boy who paid a coyote organization \$2,000 to smuggle him into Arizona; however, when they got there his coyote abandoned him in the desert. He was questioned about this incident while awaiting deportation in a detention center after he was rescued by United States immigration officials.

Not all smugglers are predators who abandon, kidnap, or kill their charges (*People-smuggling*). Some of these smuggling networks are run by people who are good standing members of their community (*People-Smuggling*). I did what I could to make each one appear, in some sense, genuine in their offer. I tried not to give many details that would give away a good versus a bad smuggler. I wanted the viewer to make their best educated decision about who they could trust on this journey.

However, some of the people a reader might choose to trust should not be trusted. Another big area focused on in the story is the trouble of human trafficking. It is estimated that there are approximately 40,000 people in slavery at any one time in the United States. The United States of America is generally a destination for trafficking victims who are recruited in their home countries and transported through other countries (Programs). The United States Department of Justice estimates 14,500 – 17,500 foreign-born individuals are trafficked into the United States annually with 3,500 – 5,500 coming from Central/ South America (Bales). Often smugglers will sell their human cargo into modern day slavery. It is not an easy thing to escape. I wanted to express all the different avenues that lead to people being taken captive against their will as well as the struggles they face trying to escape their captors.

Migrants suffer terrible abuses at the hands of these people. Far too many are afraid that even if they run away they will be caught again and killed. I used the story of Miguel, from *To Plead Our Own Cause*, who had been working on a farm in Florida to influence the trafficking parts of the book. He was on the farm of the infamous Ramoses, who ended up under the investigation of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) in 2001 (Bales). Three of the Ramos family members were convicted of conspiracy to hold 700 people involuntarily (Bales). In the end, Miguel is given a proper chance at life in America. However, he had some difficult choices to make to get to that point. I put the power in the readers hand to stand up against their captors—if they have the courage.

Granted, these choices are easier to make on paper than in real life but this book is designed to help people become aware. There are a great many more choices that a migrant may have to face. Things are not always as they seem and many of the choices migrants make can cost them their lives. Many of the endings in this ‘choose-your-own adventure story’ conclude with the death of the main character and that was not necessarily the intent. Death is often where migrant journeys end. However, migrants still make the choice to come to the United States. They are willing to risk everything to experience the American dream.

Choosing the Illustrations

By Tyler Horn

A lot of people dehumanize immigrants because they cannot visualize their plight or relate to them. Photographs can capture and convey a lot of this and help the viewer empathize with the migrant. However, not all migrant stories have photographs to go alongside their journey, so illustrating the picture is another way to capture these moments of their lives. With painting you can alter things—heighten emotion, capture a scene—in a way that photography cannot. Throughout history artists have painted in an attempt to change people's views on situations and inspiring them by telling stories (some examples are Francisco Goya's *The Third of May 1808* and Eugene Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*). With these paintings, I intended to paint in a manner to evoke emotional responses from a viewer who will be able to relate more to the story.

I decided to paint ten different paintings of the different choices you can make within the book. It was difficult to decide on which choices to illustrate. I decided to paint scenes of reality of what can actually happen to a migrant that travels illegally. I used different styles of painting for each one. Creating each piece was very difficult as I had to choose from over forty different choices from the original story board. Choosing the ten images that were going to be in the book proved to be tough, as well. I needed to choose ones to show the dangers of the journey, the troubles or the cooperation with the authorities, the hard work and labor of the migrants, and them travelling in general—pictures that would draw the viewer into the paintings and help them relate more to the story.

The following is a description of the paintings I decided on:

The paintings of the main character working (in the orange orchard and in the field with many rows): I wanted to have more of an atmospheric perspective in these paintings to show that there is a lot of work in the fields for him to be doing, an endless amount of manual labor and hard work. The orange orchard signifies him being trafficked to do this work, where is not getting any pay and he is entrapped by the trees. The painting with the many rows of crop is where he got a job and he is working the field. There is less of an entrapment feel to this, but it still seems endless because of the hard, manual labor he is doing.

When he is on top of the train, I wanted to show that he has travelled far to get where he is going to. I wanted this one to be atmospheric to show how far he is travelling on his journey. This painting is one that shows adventure in his travels. It also shows danger as he rides on top of the speeding train, hoping for a better future to come in the United States.

The drowning painting is a representation of just that, drowning. It is just a singular hand that is limp out of the water that surrounds it. The water looks endless in the painting showing that there was little chance of him trying to make it across. This painting is realistic and raw to show the perils of trying to get to the United States of America. Millions of people make this journey every year, and many die along the way. This painting shows one of the many ways that it could possibly happen.

In the scenes where you can either choose to go with the gang or the old man, I chose to go with a more painterly approach. I went with a dark purple for the background for both, which are connecting pictures that are painted in the same manner, the gang's side has more of a red-violet, while the old man's side is more blue-violet; this is to symbolize that there are two different choices you can make here. The dark purple symbolizes that there could be danger on both sides. There is also a golden color in both that symbolizes that there could be a good choice there as well, but you have to be wise about your decisions.

The painting of the shooting is painted only in reds and blacks. This painting depicts two men who were shot; one is dead, while the other is dying. The way the dead man is positioned is a reference to a Honore Daumier lithograph entitled *Rue Transnonain, 15 April 1834*. The red, for the most part, is light and washed. It drips from the top of the page down to the bottom like the blood that is pouring from the one man's chest and spilling out of his hands. The wounds are the most intense reds on the page. The drips from the top of the page reach both men, signifying the blood that is fleeing their bodies.

The painting of the main character running away is one of fear and escape. He is running really fast and things are blurring. The color within the paintings is not staying within the lines. His surroundings are turning into tunnel vision. There are lines of color moving inwards towards the man, bringing much emphasis to him and his face. The man's main concern is getting away from something. There is a grave look of fear upon his face as he looks back to whatever he is running away from.

The painting of the main character being deported is a somber one. The main character hangs his head as the two policemen guide him to be arrested. The officers are both wearing glasses and are frowning; they are being detached from the situation. They do not care about the man they are arresting. The background is a sickly yellow to show that something is wrong with this scene.

The courtroom scene was painted to be like the work of courtroom painters. It depicts a scene where the main character is up at the stand and is looking and pointing at the two defendants, while the woman too is pointing in their direction while looking at the judge, while the judge is looking at the defendants. I did this to draw the eye of the viewer to look around at the painting more, to see what is going on within the painting, so they can infer what is happening in the story.

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