

The Number on My Father's Arm / El número en el brazo de papá

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Spanish translation by Gabriela Baeza Ventura



ABOUT THE BOOK

GENRE: Middle Grade and
Young Adult Fiction
Trade Paperback
Bilingual Flip Book:
English and Spanish
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168 pages

5 ½ x 8 ½



SUMMARY

A young boy seeks to unravel the mystery of his father's nightmares and the number tattooed on his arm in this short bilingual novel that will acquaint readers ages 10-15 with the Holocaust and the expulsion of Mexicans and Mexican Americans from the United States in the early part of the twentieth century.

VOCABULARY

The Number on My Father's Arm / El número en el brazo de papá is a bilingual “flip” book that includes the English and Spanish versions in the same book. This unique format makes this book ideal for English- or Spanish-speaking classrooms, as well as ELL or ESL groups.

Book Synopsis

All his life, young Tomás has overheard and been terrified by his father’s nightmares, but Papi never explains his cries and screams. Even Mami doesn’t know why he has bad dreams. Later, Tomás learns his father was a medic in World War II and his best friend died in his arms. The boy wonders if that experience could be the reason for his nighttime terrors. In school, Tomás learns about the Holocaust and sees photographs of Jewish prisoners with numbers on their arms. He is shocked because his father has a similar tattoo! Could his father be a concentration camp survivor? Why won’t Papi tell his family about his experiences? As he tries to unravel the mystery of his father’s nightmares and tattoo, Tomás finds out his father—along with his parents—was put on a train many years earlier and deported from Los Angeles to Mexico. Are his father’s nightmares related to his experiences in the war or being forced to leave the only home and country he ever knew? What does that tattoo have to do with being deported? Eventually, Tomás finds boxes of mementos that help him solve the mysteries and come to terms with Papi’s suffering.

Areas Addressed in This Teaching Guide

- Teaching Overview
- Before Reading Introduction
- While Reading the Book Questions
- After Reading the Book Exercises
- Activities to Connect Reader to Story
- Subject Teaching Guides
- Author’s Note to Educators

Subject Areas Covered in This Teaching Guide

- ELL/ELS
- English Language Arts

Teaching Overview

The Number on My Father’s Arm / El número en el brazo de papá is a story surrounding the subjects of Latino history, World War II and the repatriation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the Great Depression. Topics covered include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), POW camps and Nazi concentration camps, human rights, dehumanization, as well as family relationships and dynamics. Themes surround loyalty to family, country and self; empathy; honor; remembrance; hope and honor. In the classroom, the book aligns nicely with middle school and early high school reading and writing knowledge and skills.

For a teacher’s convenience, this guide offers ELL, ESL and Language Arts activities that satisfy reading, writing, creative, critical, listening and viewing skills. The teacher is encouraged to expand upon the following activities and to creatively substitute and/or incorporate additional activities and to creatively substitute and/or incorporate other reading and writing activities into their instruction.

Comprehensive Strategies

The following Before, During and After Reading strategies contain questions and activities for improving reading, writing, listening and viewing skills.

Before Reading

Exercise One

1. Introduce the book by providing a brief synopsis, including the connection to WW II, the Battle of the Bulge, the Holocaust, Latino History, Mexican and Mexican American repatriation during the Great Depression and PTSD. Explain the central role that secrecy plays in the book and the fact that the father in the book, Eliseo, is a war veteran who deals with his PTSD by keeping it a secret.
2. Explore why people keep or make a pact to keep a secret. Sample responses might be to keep from hurting someone or to keep from embarrassing someone.
3. Take a large sheet of chart or easel paper and write “Why Secrets Are Kept” at the top. Elicit responses and write them down. After a number of items are listed, ask students to make their own list (4-7 original ideas).
4. Repeat the exercise, but this time write “When is it Okay to Share a Secret?” at the top. Elicit responses and write them out. After a number of items are listed, ask students to make their own list (4-7 original ideas).

Skill Set Addressed: Writing for a variety of purposes, i.e., to express, discover, record, develop and reflect on ideas and/or problem solve.

5. Ask students to rewrite their responses into full sentences. Emphasize how you want students to capitalize and punctuate correctly to enhance and clarify meaning.

Skill Set Addressed: Writing mechanics.

Exercise Two

1. Read and talk about the title and the cover of the book. Ask students what they think the title, *The Number on My Father's Arm / El número en el brazo de papá*, means in relationship to the cover. Ask what they think the significance of the barbwire, the arms and the number on one of the arms means to the overall story.
2. Take students on a “book walk” and draw attention to the following parts of the book: the English and Spanish covers, the table of contents, English and Spanish text.
3. Ask students if they understand the difference between a book that is “loosely based” on someone’s life as compared to a book that is based entirely on someone’s life. If needed, explain the difference.
4. Have students discuss what advantages there are to publishing the English and Spanish version of the story in the same book.

Skill Set Addressed: Critical thinking, observation and verbal communication.

While Reading

Use these questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension and facilitate a deeper appreciation while reading the story. Encourage students to cite evidence from the text to support their responses. At the same time, expand their critical-thinking skills by asking for opinions based on solid reasoning garnered from the text.

CHAPTER ONE

Teacher's Note: Depending on the amount of information you provided in the introduction to the book regarding PTSD, review or provide this information before reading the chapter or incorporate the information while reviewing the chapter.

1. How old is the narrator, Tomás? How old is the narrator when he becomes aware of his father's crying and screaming?
2. Based on what the father, Eliseo, yells during his nightmare, who do you imagine he is talking to? Where do you imagine the nightmare is taking place?
3. Why do you suppose Tomás' mother, Rosa, downplays Eliseo's nightmare?
4. Why do you feel Rosa has yet to ask Eliseo about why he cries and screams? What reason does Rosa give to Tomás for not asking?
5. What does the first chapter tell us about Tomás, Rosa and Eliseo?

CHAPTER TWO

Teacher's Note: Depending on the amount of information you provided in the introduction to the book regarding WWII, review or provide this information before reading the chapter or incorporate the information while reviewing the chapter.

1. How old is the narrator, Tomás, now? How old is his father, Eliseo? What year is it and why is this important?
2. Why do you suppose keeping a yearly garden is important to Eliseo? Do you think the garden plays a "character" or symbolizes something in the book? If so, what?
3. Does your family have a yearly tradition similar to planting a garden? Does it have a special meaning to you?
4. What does Eliseo reveal to Tomás in the garden? Why do you suppose Eliseo has waited this long to share this information?
5. Why is "Uno, Dos, Tres, Calabaza" important to Tomás? Do you have a similar game that you play with a loved one?
6. Why does Tomás think Eliseo cries and screams in his dreams?
7. Why do you suppose Rosa wants to know if Eliseo shares another wartime story with Tomás?

CHAPTER THREE

Teacher's Note: Depending on the amount of information you provided in the introduction to the book regarding the Holocaust, Nazis, and concentration camps, review or provide this information before reading the chapter or incorporate the information while reviewing the chapter.

1. In what year does the chapter take place? How old is Tomás? How old is Eliseo?
2. What do the slides tell us about Hitler, Nazis and concentration camps?
3. Have you ever heard of Anne Frank or her book, *The Diary of Anne Frank*? If so, can you share what you remember about the book with the class?
4. When Tomás says that his father has a number on his arm, why does his teacher, Mrs. Franklin, react the way she does?
5. What newfound importance does the number on his father's arm play in Tomás' eyes?

CHAPTER FOUR

Teacher's Note: Depending on the amount of information you provided in the introduction to the book regarding WWII and the Battle of the Bulge, review or provide this information before reading the chapter or incorporate the information while reviewing the chapter.

1. Tomás' father, Eliseo, claims that the number on his arm is his lucky number. Does he explain why?
2. What does Eliseo refusing to talk to Tomás' class about the war and his leaving the dinner table reveal about Eliseo?
3. Why do you suppose Tomás' mother, Rosa, is willing to wait for as long as it takes for Eliseo to explain where the number on his arm came from?
4. What do the items in Eliseo's wartime memory box tell us about him? About those he served with? About the Battle of the Bulge?

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Beyond the photographs, what else does Tomás find in Eliseo's wartime memory box?
2. Why do you suppose Eliseo saved these items?
3. What do the items reveal about Eliseo?
4. Why do you think Eliseo started to cry when he finished talking to Tomás?
5. Did Tomás believe that the number on Eliseo's arm had nothing to do with Nazis?

CHAPTER SIX

1. How old is Tomás at the start of this chapter? How old is Eliseo?
2. Given what you read in the chapter, what is a senior thesis? On what subject is Tomás writing his thesis on?
3. What steps lead up to Tomás remembering the map in his father's wartime memory box?
4. What does the fact that Tomás did not open the wartime memory box by himself tell you about Tomás?

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. Based on what Jessica says at the opening of this chapter, how would you describe her?
2. When he opens the wartime memory box, what does Tomás find? What do these items reveal about Eliseo?
3. What does “The Norms” letter reveal about him? Does it reveal anything about Eliseo?
4. Why do you feel Eliseo kept the fact that he was a war hero and a Prisoner of War from his family?
5. Do you think Tomás will keep the secret of what he found from his father? Explain.
6. Did Tomás find, what he now thinks, is the real reason for why his father cries and screams? If so what is it and what were the previous explanations as to why he cried and screamed?

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. What was the significance of the Western Union telegram and the postcard that Rosa shared with Tomás?
2. How did Eliseo’s father, Arturo, influence Eliseo’s behavior when it comes to keeping secrets?
3. Why do you feel Rosa wishes she would have let a young Tomás ask Eliseo why he cries and screams?

CHAPTER NINE

Teacher’s Note: Depending on the amount of information you provided in the introduction to the book regarding Anthony Acevedo, review or provide information about him before reading the chapter or incorporate the information while reviewing the chapter. [For select information on Anthony Acevedo refer to the Author’s Note at the end of the teaching guide.]

1. Is it okay that Tomás and Rosa made a plan to have Eliseo tell them about his past or should they have waited until he was ready to tell them?
2. If Tomás and Rosa simply asked Eliseo to tell them about his past, do you think he would have told them everything?
3. Do you think it was wrong for Rosa to show Eliseo the Western Union telegram and the postcard? Why or why not?
4. What happened to Eliseo in the story actually happened to the real Anthony Acevedo. Why do you think Anthony and Eliseo never gave the enemy the information they were after?
5. How did the Field Marshal try to belittle Eliseo? Give specific examples.
6. Why do you suppose Eliseo finally agreed to go and talk to Tomás’ class?

CHAPTER TEN

1. Describe the conditions Eliseo and his fellow POWs lived in while at Stalag IX-B. What or who did Eliseo turn to for strength?
2. While listening to Eliseo talk to his class, what does Tomás now think is the real reason for his father’s cries and screams?
3. What information did Eliseo keep in his journal? Why was this information important?
4. Why do you think the US government made the POWs of Berga sign a paper promising never to talk about the camp?
5. If the number on Eliseo’s arm was not put there by Nazis, why and how do you think it got there? Don’t forget that he referred to the tattoo as his lucky number.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Teacher's Note: Depending on the amount of information you provided in the introduction to the book regarding the repatriation of Mexican and Mexican Americans, as well as the Raid at Placita Park, review or provide this information before reading the chapter or incorporate the information while reviewing the chapter.

1. How old is Tomás at the start of this chapter? How old is Eliseo?
2. The raid of Placita Park on February 26, 1931, is real. How do you feel about Mexicans and Mexican Americans being rounded up and shipped out of the country without warning? Do you feel the US government has a right to do this?
3. Were Mexicans and Mexican Americans shipped out of the US in cattle cars? Research this question and submit your answer, along with the number of individuals who were shipped out.
4. Was the fact that Eliseo witnessed the woman being murdered the real reason for why he cries and screams? If yes, what supports this answer?
5. Is what happened to Mexican and Mexican Americans similar to what happened to Jews during World WWII? How would Eliseo answer this question?

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. What conditions did the Mexicans and Mexican Americans encounter in Mexico?
2. Where did the number tattooed on Eliseo's arm come from? Why did his father, Arturo, insist the number be tattooed on Eliseo's arm?
3. Research a recent time when permanent markers were used to write numbers on the arms of Mexicans entering the US. Present your findings to the class.
4. What made the number on Eliseo's arm lucky?
5. How did Eliseo's father feel about the US? Do you think he was right for why he felt this way and the way he treated Eliseo?

EPILOGUE

1. How old is Tomás at the start of the chapter? How old is Eliseo?
2. What did the final memory box that Eliseo give Tomás reveal about Eliseo?
3. Go online and see if you can find two photographs that are similar when it comes to preserving the memory of the Jewish Holocaust and the Repatriation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Present your photographs to the class.
4. What is Eliseo's greatest wish for the world?
5. Are there current items in the news that you feel are history repeating itself?

Skill Set Addressed: Reading/Writing: fluency/silent reading; vocabulary development; interpreting text through critical thinking, observation and discussion; using one's own knowledge and experience to comprehend.

AFTER READING

Have students select four of the topics below and then discuss or write a brief response about whether they agree or disagree with the statements. Ask students to share their thoughts with the class as a whole or in groups.

1. Keeping secrets is never a good thing.
2. Keeping secrets is okay as long as no one is hurt.
3. Tomás and his mother, Rosa, should have waited until Eliseo was ready to tell them his secret.
4. Tomás' teacher, Mrs. Franklin, was wrong for thinking Tomás was lying about the number on his father's arm.
5. The repatriation of Mexican and Mexican Americans to Mexico during the Great Depression was right and proper.
6. In what ways was the repatriation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans similar to the Holocaust?
7. A memory box is a good way to deal with emotional struggles.
8. History doesn't repeat itself.
9. Eliseo's garden helps to bring Eliseo and Tomás together.
10. The Holocaust should not be taught in schools.

Skill Set Addressed: Reading/Writing: Interpreting text through critical thinking, observation, discussion and writing; using one's own knowledge and experience to comprehend and organize thoughts.

Activities to Connect Reader to Story

Consider the list below. Make a selection and have students carry out the assignment.

1. Create a Memory Box: Have students decorate the outside of their box and place inside it those momentos that have meaning for them. Have students present their memory boxes to the class.
2. Create a Piece of Art: Have students create a piece of art that they feel captures the repatriation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans and the Jewish Holocaust. Have students present their art to the class. Additional assignments might include having students break into groups to discuss the projects or to write a brief paper on how they felt a project related to the book.
3. Write a Poem or Song: Have students write a poem or song explaining why Eliseo screams and cries. Have students present their song or poem to the class. Ask students to explain the meaning of the work as it relates to the book. Additional assignments might include having students break into groups to discuss the projects or to write a brief paper on how they felt a project related to the book.
4. Have students pretend that they are US government officials. Then ask them to write a letter to Eliseo apologizing for asking him to keep his time in a concentration camp a secret. Once finished with the exercise, ask students to read their letters aloud. Were the letters impactful? If so, what made them impactful: words, phrasing, grammar? Likewise, was grammar and phrasing used correctly?
5. Ask students to watch an interview featuring Anthony Acevedo and report what they learned to the class as a whole or in groups. To find an online video, search for, "Anthony C. Acevedo, interview".
6. Ask students to listen to an interview featuring Anthony Acevedo and then compare the interview to the book. What did they hear that differed from the book? What did they hear that was similar to the book? [To see noted differences from Mr. Acevedo's life compared to the book, refer to the Author's Note at the end of this study guide.]

Skill Set Addressed: Reading/Writing/Research/Viewing: Interpreting text and research through critical and creative thinking, observation, discussion, and writing. Using one's own knowledge, creativeness, experience and research to comprehend and/or persuade. How art and creative writing extends the meaning of text. Representing how art and creative writing help to represent a text's meaning.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Because *The Number on My Father's Arm / El número en el brazo de papá* covers a variety of themes and concepts, the story is ideal for use in teaching a variety of subjects while strengthening a student's reading, comprehension and analytical skills. Below are a number of suggested strategies for use of the book in a couple of subjects.

ELL/ESL Teaching Strategies

1. After covering the introduction and exploring the book materials, read aloud the first two pages of either the English or Spanish versions. Model thinking aloud about what you read. Then read the other language version aloud. Flipping from the Spanish to English versions and vice-versa, model which words sound or are close to being spelled the same way. Write those words on the chalk or whiteboard.
2. After discussing the similarities or differences of the words on the board, ask students to pair up and do the same exercise. If your class is strictly an ESL class, ask students to pair up and compare the Spanish to the English versions. What words look the same, which look different? Have students write their lists and then share with the class.
3. Encourage student engagement by asking students to share an experience where they encountered a word selected. Then ask students to discuss what the opening to the book reveals. What does it tell you about the narrator? His family? What do they feel the story will be about? This exercise engages students as readers and gets them thinking about the text, characters, relationships, situation, and most importantly, language.
4. As you start to read the book, and even after you progress into the book, assign partners and have them alternate reading between paragraphs or pages. Have them repeat passages after one another or listen to the more fluent reader. Students who speak Spanish can help with pronunciation of the Spanish or read the Spanish alongside a student reading the English text, and vice-versa.
5. Ask students to select a page from which to write down ten words in Spanish or English. Have them "flip" the book over to the same page in the Spanish or English versions, then have them find and write down the words they feel match those that they wrote down.
6. With a partner, have students lay the Spanish and English versions of the story side-by-side. Practice memorizing short sentences and then saying them aloud. Check if correct by looking at the appropriate version. [Note: As students answer the final two points below, have them practice their English or Spanish.]
7. After finishing a chapter, ask students to write three to five points that the chapter makes or questions they have about the text. Then let students pair up and discuss.
8. After the reading:
 - a. Working in pairs, ask students to identify which character they identified closest with, then have them explain why.
 - b. Working in pairs, ask students to retell either the plot of the entire book or key details in a particular chapter. Then ask students to write a short summary or opinion about what they felt was the major theme of the book.

Skill Set Addressed: Learning through cooperation and exchange of ideas and reference materials.

Reading/Writing/Viewing: Interpreting text and research through critical thinking, observation, listening, discussion and writing. Using one's own knowledge and experience to comprehend and learn. Retaining information and language through association and repetition. Developing confidence and skill through speaking and writing in a new language.

English Language Arts

The following ELA exercises can be offered during the reading of the book or once the book is completed. The primary purpose of each exercise is to provide students an opportunity to practice the language they are learning.

1. Have students discuss as a class, in groups or in pairs, what the first chapter reveals about Tomás, his family and his father's nightmares.
2. Separate your class into equal groups of two, three or four. Assign half of each group to argue for Tomás asking his father why he cries and screams and the other half to argue against. Ask students to focus on fluency and phonics of words. This exercise allows for visual and auditory learning so that students are not just reading but interacting with each other to explore the sound and meaning of words.
3. Using specific examples from the story, as a class or individually, have students compare and contrast two of the characters in the story. Have them write down at least five examples. When finished, have students present one of their findings to the class and to read the part of the story that supports their conclusion.
4. Vocabulary is an important strand of language arts, as is the continual growth in a student's word bank. From 3rd to 12th grades, students will acquire approximately 3,000 new vocabulary words per year! With this in mind, have students write down words from the book that are unfamiliar. Students can also create flashcards from this list that they can combine with others in order to practice word recognition and delivery.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Because *The Number on My Father's Arm / El número en el brazo de papá* is loosely based on the extraordinary life of Anthony C. Acevedo, I felt it was important to provide educators with a brief rundown of what in the story was factual and what was not. I also wanted educators to know that the Acevedo family read the manuscript and approved of the changes I made to their father's story. For that, I am grateful.

The character of Eliseo is based on the life of Anthony Claude Acevedo. He was born in San Bernardino, California, on July 31, 1924. He was indeed a medic during World War II, who became a prisoner of war at Stalag IX-B and the concentration camp Berga an der Elster. Also true is the fact that he was the first Mexican American to register as a Holocaust survivor at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

Like the character of Eliseo, the experiences Anthony lived through at Stalag IX-B and Berga caused night terrors that he lived with up until the day he passed away at age ninety-four on February 11, 2018.

It is true that Anthony kept a diary of his experiences as a POW that included a list of some American soldiers who died. His diary was one of the first that was known to be written by an American held in a concentration camp. His diary proved critical in documenting the deaths and atrocities inside the camp, and remarkably, it is because of Anthony's diary that a number of families learned the fate of their sons, husbands and fathers.

Anthony was captured at the Battle of the Bulge on January 6, 1945, after days of brutal firefights. It is true that the medic's equipment he carried on his back stopped a bullet from killing him. The character of Murray Gluckman is based on Murray Pruzan, a close friend of Anthony's who was killed by machine gun fire during one of those firefights. "The Norm" is also real, but his character in the story is mostly fictitious. He never wrote Anthony a letter, and soon after the war ended, they had little to no contact. It is true that Murray and "The Norm" were medics and that they, along with Anthony, were trained to be medics together.

In the days following Anthony's capture, it is true that he was interrogated, along with others, by a Gestapo SS Field Marshal. It is also true that the Field Marshal knew details about their lives. How he knew that information is not known. In Anthony's case, it is true that the Field Marshal interrogated him in perfect Spanish. Furthermore, it is true that Anthony was awarded the Purple Heart for being wounded on the field of battle and the Bronze Star for aiding American soldiers while under fire.

The medic's armband—and the signatures on it that were described in the book as belonging to those who were liberated on the same day as Anthony—is a real piece of memorabilia. The palm cross that men kissed just days before their liberation is also real. Anthony fashioned this cross himself, and dozens more, before leaving for France. He passed them out to soldiers who were in need of hope. In 2010, Anthony donated his diary, medic's armband, palm cross and several other historical artifacts to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.

And the affidavit that Eliseo read to Tomás' class? The one that required him and the others who were imprisoned with him at Berga to never talk about their experiences? Surely this is something conjured up by an author who needs a reason for why Papi couldn't talk about his wartime experiences. No, sadly enough, the affidavit is part of history. The US government and the Pentagon made these men sign the affidavit, and they were not officially recognized as being held in a Nazi concentration camp until 2009. Prior to this time, the fact that they had been held captive was denied by the US government. Some of those who tried to tell their stories to government officials were told they suffered from hallucinations or psychotic episodes.

Following the war, the Nazi responsible for the suffering at Berga, Erwin Metz, was sentenced to death for the murder of a US POW named Morton Goldstein. However, a War Tribunal later reduced his sentence to life imprisonment. He was freed after serving nine years, which amounts to one year for every eight American POWs murdered under his watch.

It is interesting to note that since February 21, 2019, only eleven states in the United States had laws mandating Holocaust education; other states recommend inclusion of Holocaust education themes in their curriculums. However, each state is left to decide to what extent the students in their schools will learn about the Holocaust. Interestingly enough, a study conducted by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany in 2018 found that two-thirds of American millennials could not identify what Auschwitz was, and twenty-two percent of millennials hadn't heard of the Holocaust or were not sure whether they had heard of it.

As far as Anthony's private life is concerned, in the story he was married once, but in real life he was married twice. His first wife was named Amparo "Chita" Martínez, a young woman he met on a train after visiting his family in Durango, Mexico after the war. He divorced his first wife after thirty-two years of marriage. He then married his second wife, María Dolores, a woman he had a romance with before the war. They were supposed to reunite after the war, but decades passed before they found each other again.

In the story, Eliseo has one son, the fictitious character Tomás; in real life, Anthony had four children by his first wife. They are named Anthony, who was not a junior, Fernando, Rebeca and Ernesto. Anthony and his little sister were born in the United States, but their mother and father were born in Mexico. Anthony was deported to Mexico with his mother and sister during the Great Depression. His father was already living in Mexico.

The incident leading to the deportation of the characters in my story is based on historical accounts. On February 26, 1931, it was a clear and bright Thursday afternoon in Los Angeles, hundreds were gathered at Placita Park in the heart of the city's Mexican community, when all of a sudden, city police and plainclothes federal agents armed with guns and batons appeared out of nowhere. The two entrances to the park were secured, and an estimated 400 Mexicans and Mexican Americans were forced to line up in order to prove they were in the United States legally.

As panic swept through the park, flatbed trucks drove up, and those without the proper documentation were loaded onto the trucks and driven away. They were transported to La Grande Station, at the time the city's main railroad station. According to Joseph Dunn, a former Democratic state senator from California, who researched this forgotten episode of US history, "Once there, they were ordered onto previously chartered trains and taken deep into Mexico."

Additional research conducted by Dunn shows that about 1.8 million Mexicans were deported during the 1930s. Of that number about 60 percent were US citizens. When people were deported, like the characters in the book, Anthony and his sister, along with their mother, traveled in a passenger car to the Mexican border, where they were transferred to a cattle car. It is not known where they disembarked from the cattle car. However, what is known is that thousands of Mexicans and Mexican Americans were dropped off deep into Mexico without water and food. Many knew no one, spoke little to no Spanish and suffered through many hardships, which included having to build shacks and use the restroom in holes they dug in the ground. There were instances of brutality and there were also accounts of people being murdered; however, the incident that is portrayed in this book is fictitious.

As to the number on Anthony's arm, no, there was no such number on his arm. However, the number in the story, 27016, was the number assigned to him by his German captors. However, I was inspired to make this the focus of my story after I read a news article in December 2018, in which migrants waiting to have their asylum claims processed and reviewed at the US border were given numbers, which were written on their arms with permanent marker.

About his garden and memory boxes. Anthony loved to spend time outside, and he occasionally tended to his plants. However, he never kept a garden from one year to the next. As far as memory boxes go, he never kept memory boxes similar to those described in my story. However, he did keep large boxes of memories he left to his children.

What is most truthful about this story is the fact that it was Anthony's fondest hope that people truly understood that Mexicans and Mexican Americans have played, and will continue to play, a vital role in America's history. He wanted people to know that Mexicans and Mexican Americans have contributed to this nation and have suffered for it. Most importantly, he truly believed in the adage that if people do not learn from history, they are doomed to repeat it.

In my story, I tried to capture this sentiment through the use of the two photographs comparing Mexicans and Mexican Americans to Jews boarding trains, as well as the numbers tattooed on the Jewish prisoner's arm and on Eliseo's arm. While Anthony left no such photographs behind and did not have a number on his arm, I, along with his family, have no doubt that he'd approve, and applaud, the message I want to convey.

In closing, it is also true that Anthony Claude Acevedo was an American hero, who happened to be a Mexican American. I hope this story will bring honor and glory to his name and to the memory of a life well lived.

MEET THE AUTHOR & TRANSLATOR



RODOLFO ALVARADO is the author of *Junior's Dream / El sueño de Junior* (Piñata Books, 2020) and three books in The Perla Garcia Mystery Series, including *Perla Garcia and the Mystery of La Llorona* (Caballo Press, 2015). He lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with his family.

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ABOUT PIÑATA BOOKS

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