

JANE ADDAMS PEACE ASSOCIATION **LEARN AND DO READING GUIDE**

LAND OF THE CRANES **BY AIDA SALAZAR**

2021 JANE ADDAMS CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD HONOR TITLE

This Learn and Do Reading Guide is intended to help teachers, librarians, and family members facilitate important, genuine reflection, dialogue, and inspiration for action among young people as they read this commended title together or on their own.

If the adult is reading aloud, the commentary can be shared and the questions posed as seems fit in the process. If young people are reading independently, Building Background and Reflection can be discussed with an adult before and after reading. Dialogue Questions could be assigned for written consideration while reading, with discussion afterward. All or just a few prompts and questions can be utilized. In all cases, conversation about the book is key.

In a group setting, children can be asked to turn to someone nearby to consider a question before several young people share with the whole group. It is so important that young people share their own perspective and learn about others' as well. Here are some useful sentence starters for students extending each other's thinking; When you said...I thought/I wondered...Before I read this I thought...now I think.... This makes me feel....because....

For more information see our [Learn & Do Curriculum Guidelines](#)



The [Jane Addams Children's Book Award](#) annually recognizes children's books of literary and aesthetic excellence that effectively engage children in thinking about peace, social justice, global community, and equity for all people.

Jane Addams wrote, "Peace would no longer be an absence of war, but the unfolding of worldwide processes making for the nurture of human life." She saw the fostering of "sympathetic knowledge" as the building block of peace. (Newer Ideals of Peace - 1907). In modern terms, the award criteria asks, "How can people work with compassion, empathy, and activism to advance Jane Addams's belief that achieving true peace means more than ending war; it means ensuring justice for all people?" "Sympathetic knowledge," compassion, empathy, and activism are the distinguishing features of peace-building that we seek to emphasize in our reading guides.

BEFORE READING:

Adults:

It is so important to prepare for the emotional safety of the children reading *Land of the Cranes*. This preparation is sensitively addressed by the author, Aida Salazar, & Dr. Carla España in their [study guide](#) for the book. You will find excellent questions and further ideas for teaching the book in their study guide as well.

Are the children or their family members with whom you are reading immigrants to this country? Their willingness and practical ability to share their experience, especially as relates to detention and deportation, may be limited, though they will have strong connections with the story. They need attentive support. *Land of the Cranes* will be a window into the painful conditions of detention for all students. Encourage empathy and questioning.

Young Readers:

In her letter to you at the end of this book, Aida Salazar says, “Thank you for your courage to bear witness to Betita’s difficult story.” May you be strong as you read this story! May you notice what you feel as you read, may you ask lots of questions and may you feel empowered to speak up as Betita does.

AZTLAN PAGES 3 - 31

Building Background:

What do we know about, what can be learned going in?

Before reading consider this: *“Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror.”* Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop

Mirrors, Windows and Sliding Glass Doors

- Based on the book summary and cover, what are you wondering? Before you begin reading, do you think this book will be a window, mirror, or sliding glass door for you? Why?
- Now, jump in and meet Betita, her family, and vecindad. Don’t read or speak Spanish? Be prepared to look up key Spanish words online as you go!

Dialogue

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- Betita is painting a warm and glowing picture of her life in East L.A. via these initial poems. Can you “hear” her voice as she speaks to you? What does she have you wondering?
- Papi shares a mythical understanding of them as cranes returning to Aztlan. How does Betita in her poetic way use Papi's stories to describe and understand her experience?
- Foreshadowing (a warning or indication of future events) occurs in Sanctuary Breakfast (pg.20), Cartel (pg. 25 & 26) and Waiting (pg.30&31). What effect did these poems have on your thinking and feeling as you read?

Reflect

Deeper dive or looking as a whole. How does this change your feeling/thinking?

How are you doing reading this book in poem form? Are you finding it different from reading prose? Are you changing how you read? Try reading one of the poems out loud. Does doing so change your understanding?

Building Background

What do we know about, what can be learned going in?

In this section, Papi and other construction workers without documents are rounded up by ICE (Immigration & Customs Enforcement) and eventually deported to Mexico. What do you know about being ‘undocumented’ and deportation? What have you heard adults say about these things? For a basic and heartfelt consideration of immigration watch this 3 minute video. [Kids Talk Immigration](#)

Dialogue

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- What are Betita and her family's strategies for staying strong while they are grieving being apart?
- Which poem in this section causes you to feel the strongest empathy (the ability to understand and share the feelings of another) with Betita? Explain why you chose that poem especially.

Reflect

Deeper dive or looking as a whole. How does this change your feeling/thinking?

On page 48 in Learning Tears, Betita writes: We are learning about one another/About the hurt in our hearts/Sometimes, that’s the most/ important thing to learn. What did you learn from this section of Betita’s story? How is your thinking or feeling changed by what you learned?

MICTLAN PAGES 68 - 118

Building Background

What do we know about, what can be learned going in?

Mictlan is the underworld of Aztec mythology and certainly the SUV ride Bentita takes with her mother brings them to an underworld—a desert detention facility commonly referred to as ‘la hielera’, an icebox. What do you know about detention centers? To the degree you are able, put yourself in Betita’s position as she tells of the conditions she and her mother experience. One helpful pointer: when she refers to the “crinkle, crackle” of “silver capes” she is referring to space blankets such as below.



Amazon Photo

Dialogue

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- Finally in Right Next to Us (pg. 89) Mami makes a connection with another person in the detention center. What do you come to understand about Josefina’s family and how each member is feeling?
- Papi told Betita to ‘remember la dulzura (the sweetness)’. She tries, but it is not easy. Mami reaches out to the almost alone teens out of the kindness of her teacher’s heart. Do these attempts help Betita, Mami, or any of the others? Why or why not?

Reflect

Deeper dive or looking as a whole. How does this change your feeling/thinking?

Time to check in. What are you feeling or worrying and wondering about at this dark point in Betita’s story? Why?



ACLU photo

Building Background

What do we know about, what can be learned going in?

From 2016 till 2020 there was an especially aggressive US policy of rounding up immigrants without documents and detaining, and deporting them. Since 2021, there is less aggressive rounding up, but there are many more immigrants arriving in the US in search of safety. Detention centers are even more crowded. Conditions Betita experiences are still being experienced in many places. Research current detention facilities in the US or check out this update from [Interrogating Justice](#). Note that there are government detention facilities and ones run by private companies. Some of the very worst conditions are found in these private centers. Betita and her mother are in one such privately owned center.

The first poems in this section are intense in a new way, Betita and her mother react with anger and then Mami is sick. In the poem Maybe (pg. 128) we witness Betita losing hope...but then there is change. Track the subtle changes that occur as you read!

Dialogue

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- How, from your perspective, did Betita and Yanela become friends? What forces brought them together?
- Finally they hear from their lawyer. It is not all good news. What do you understand about their legal position? What are you wondering?
- In the last poem in this section, The Dreamer (pg. 155 & 156) a new girl angrily resists and is beaten. Make a prediction about the role she may play in the next part of the story. Why do you think what you do?

Reflect

Deeper dive or looking as a whole. How does this change your feeling/thinking?

- Mami is a caregiver. How is she impacting Betita and other young people and adults in the detention center? Where do you think she gets her strength?
- How much do you think Betita really believes they are cranes and how much do you think she is pretending? What is your evidence for your thinking? Is the crane story simply metaphoric or is there an element of magical realism (a genre of literature that depicts the real world as having an undercurrent of magic or fantasy) in this story?

Building Background

What do we know about, what can be learned going in?

Anáhuac means ‘close to water’ and is the name of the center of the Aztec civilization on the plateau of Mexico. As you read this final section, give thought to why Aida Salazar might have chosen this title.



NYTimes

Marisel, the new girl with Betita and her mother, has *#abolishICE* on her shirt. In 2018, the demand to abolish Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) was one of the biggest calls of the immigration rights movement. This link to [RiseandResist.org](https://riseandresist.org) outlines who ICE hurts and who ICE serves. Read through the two lists. What things listed have we seen so far in Betita’s story? What questions do you have about the elements listed on either list?

Dialogue

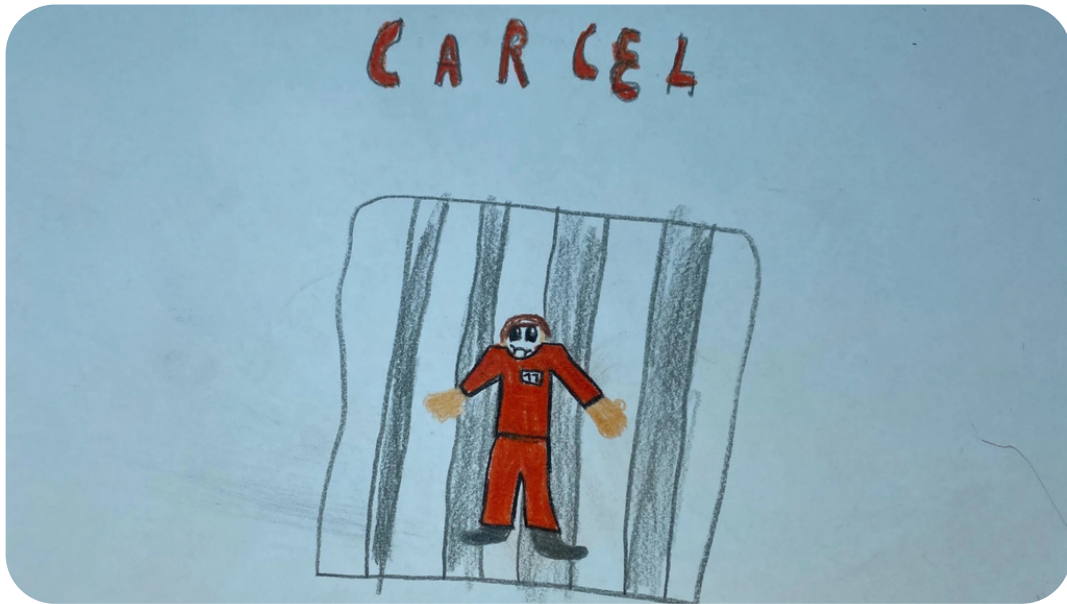
Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- On page 162 Mami says, “since when did we stop doing/ what our heart tells us is right?” What things does she do in this section that her heart is telling her is right, even though Betita is frightened?
- If you could speak to Fernanda, what would you ask her to help you understand about the legal situation Betita and her mother find themselves in?
- Marisel brings change. Betita says she is like” Papi only angrier and like Mami but wilder.” Do you agree with this comparison? What are Marisel’s motivations? How does she motivate others?

Reflect

Deeper dive or looking as a whole. How does this change your feeling/thinking?

- How does access to paper and crayons change Betita’s experience? When has writing been important to you in the way it has become for Betita?
- Yanela tells Betita of a dreadful experience of assault that happened to her while separated from her mother. How did hearing this story affect Betita? How did it affect you to read Yanela’s story?
- As Mami, Marisel, Betita and the others begin their hunger strike, what are your feelings, wonderings, and worries for them?



Texas Observer

Building Background

What do we know about, what can be learned going in?

In this section Betita is separated from her mother. Betita and the others create pictures and poems about their circumstances that eventually go viral. Below is a child's picture featured in a November 2022 [Texas Observer](#) article reporting on how children are still being separated from their families in immigration detention.

Dialogue

Spaces for conversation throughout the book

- We see different sides of Yellow Hair. What are these sides? Why do you think she does and says the things she does?
- In the poem We Did Something (pg. 227) Marisel says, "Thank you kid! You did this! Thank you!" How much do you think Betita was responsible for the release of Marisel and others? Why do you think what you do?
- Betita loses her belief that she and those around her are cranes. Why? When she receives her father's letter she believes again. How specifically does her Papi reignite her belief?

Reflect

Deeper dive or looking as a whole. How does this change your feeling/thinking?

- Recall your own feelings while reading On the Third Day (beginning pg. 193) through till Yanela is reunited with her mother. What were your different reactions during these poems? How did your feelings change as you read? What do you understand now about children being separated from their parents that you did not understand before you read this section?
- What are your thoughts and feelings about Betita's mother asking for voluntary deportation rather than persisting with her claim of asylum?
- Was Land of the Cranes a mirror, a window, and/or a sliding glass door for you? Why? Was there ever a point when as a window it became a mirror? When and why?

CALL TO ACTION

Who do you want to talk to about this issue or topic? Why is this book important for kids to read or have read to them? Who do you want to share it with?

- Read Aida Salzar's Dear Reader letter at the end of the book. What surprised you in what she said? What questions do you still have? How can you get answers to your questions? Go for it!
- Who will you tell about this story? What do you want them to know? Why? What will you say to convince them to read it?
- After reading *Land of the Cranes*, what do you wish were different in the world? What laws and ways of interacting would you like to change? How might you contribute to those changes?
- Return to page 210 and reread Betita's directions for writing a picture poem. Follow her directions and draw and write a poem from your heart in response to some part or parts of *Land of the Cranes*. Try creating picture poems regarding other things that are close to your heart. Consider who you will share them with.
- At first, Betita's poems were simply for her father. Then they became testimony to the judges concerned with her family's case. Then her poems and others she inspired became part of a campaign and finally they were sold for money to support lawyers helping immigrants. How might your writing and art communicate with a family member, convince someone of authority of something important, become part of a campaign for justice, and maybe even generate money to help where help is needed? Be specific and give at least one of these actions a try!

Additional Inquiry & Resources

These can be used to build further background and/or deepen understanding

- [Scholastic Learning Guide for Land of the Cranes](#)
- [United We Dream: The Largest Immigrant Youth-Led Network](#)
- [Kids Talk Immigration](#)
- [Aztlán, The Mythical Homeland of the Aztec-Mexica](#): thoughtco.com
- [Migrant Detention Camps in 2022](#): interrogatingjustice.org
- [Abolish ICE](#): Who does ICE hurt? Who does it serve?? Riseandresist.org

Related Jane Addams Children's Book Award Honored Titles

- [*Mama's Nightingale: A Story of Immigration and Separation* by Edwidge Danticat and Leslie Staub 2016 Honor Title](#)
- [*Poems to Dream Together / Poemas para sonar juntos* by Francisco X. Alarcon and Paula Barragan](#)

Susan Freiss spent the heart of her career co-creating and teaching in a 4/5 multiage community within a public school. She currently creates curriculum and teaches middle school reading, writing, and higher order thinking part time. She has served on the Jane Addams Book Award Selection Committee and Peace Association Board. Susan lives in Madison, Wisconsin.