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Abstract for Children's Literature Association
Indianapolis, IN
June 13-15, 2019

Keywords: children's picture books, undocumented minors, border crossing, activism

Activism and Empathy for Migrant Children: Crossing the border in Children's Literature

According to a recent Amnesty International report, the Trump administration forcibly separated 6000 families at the U.S.-Mexican border between April and August 2018. The report states that the administration is waging a deliberate campaign of human rights violations against asylum seekers to demonstrate to the world that the U.S. no longer welcomes refugees. The 'Zero tolerance' policy that cruelly separated parents and children was launched without a reunification plan, and even deported parents while their children were still held in shelters across the country. As distressing as these tactics are, undocumented migration and family separation/reunification have a long history along the border. Using a social justice framework rooted in Latina Critical Race Theory, this paper examines how children's books such as *My Journey with Papa* by Deborah Mills and Alfredo Alva (2018), *Two White Rabbits* by Jairo Buitrago (2015), and *My Shoes and I* by René Colato Laínez (2010) depict the border-crossing experience. I explore questions such as: To what extent can the hardships endured by young protagonists during the dangerous crossing prompt more privileged readers to reflect on empathy despite difference? How can children's literature raise awareness and promote advocacy for people who have been silenced or ignored due to their ethnicity, nationality, class, culture, gender, and age? How are children of color and children's literature used across the historical and political spectrum for a variety of political purposes?