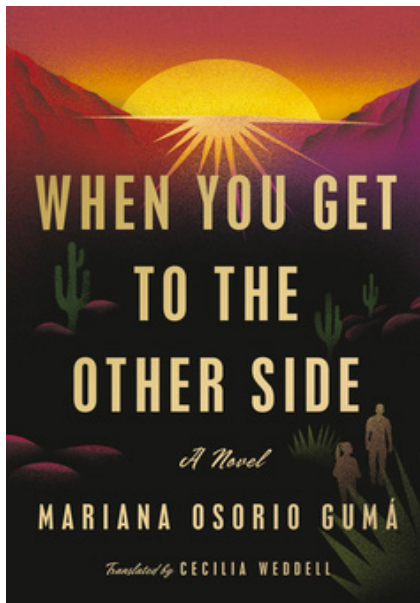




Discussion Guide



When You Get to the Other Side

Written by Mariana Osorio Gumá

Translated by Cecilia Weddell

About the Book

Genre: Fiction

Interest Level: Adult

Ordering Information

General Order Information:

leeandlow.com/contact/ordering

Secure Online Ordering:

leeandlow.com/books/when-you-get-to-the-other-side

By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue,
New York, NY 10016

SYNOPSIS

The morning they left Amatlán in the bed of a pickup truck, in the hours between darkness and daybreak, the world became immense and noisy. Emilia Ventura shut her eyes and inhaled deeply, bringing in the fresh air of her homeland. She wanted to hold onto it. Let it go down into the depths of her soul, wrapped securely in the mist of daybreak.

Twelve-year-old Emilia and fifteen-year-old Gregorio spend their childhood following their tenacious grandmother, Mamá Lochi, through the oak- and jocote-filled mountains of Amatlán, México--gathering herbs for the folk remedies Mamá Lochi makes, listening to her awe-inspiring stories about becoming a curandera, and learning how to connect with the supernatural world themselves. But, when she passes away they're left alone, with their father hundreds of miles north in the U.S. So they scrape together all their money, and pay coyotes to smuggle them to the other side.

The siblings are exhausted and famished before they even make it to the border, and they fall into only more danger after crossing. After the predatory coyotes separate Emilia from Gregorio--having their own plans for the young girl--the siblings struggle through the parching desert, and a human trafficking operation hidden within it, to make their way back to each other. They draw strength from their profound bond as well as the supernatural abilities their grandmother helped them hone, such as catching glimpses of the future and hiding to the point of invisibility. Their efforts are interwoven with flashbacks to Mamá Lochi herself, whose tales of the mystical journey she took to become a curandera teaches the siblings how insubstantial and blurred the imagined borders between past and future, self and other, and life and death truly are--preparing them, as much as anything could, to experience all these spaces on their own journey.

This masterful novel, first published in Mexico, brings the exciting talents of author Mariana Osorio Gumá to English readers. Cecilia Weddell's translation skillfully captures Osorio Gumá's engrossing mix of lyrical prose and unpretentious, natural voices. A beautiful, powerful book, which portrays a migrant experience that pierces beyond stereotypes and superficial discussions.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

BACKGROUND

A Note from Cecilia Weddell, translator of *When You Get to the Other Side*:

"*Cuando llegues al otro lado* mixes beloved elements of Latin American and Latinx literature to tell a critical and timely story with compassion and care. In its pages, the magic and heart of the matriarchs in Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Última* and Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (One Hundred Years of Solitude, translated by Gregory Rabassa) meet the urgent, colloquial, and contemporary voices that characterize Yuri Herrera's border-noir trilogy (translated by Lisa Dillman).

Gregorio and Emilia's story offers a fictional vision of the true circumstances of child migrants to the U.S., as described powerfully by Valeria Luiselli in her American Book Award-winning extended essay *Tell Me How It Ends* (translated by Luiselli and Lizzie Davis). Much like Luiselli did with her next book (the novel *Lost Children Archive*), Osorio Gumá uses fiction as a tool to get at the difficult and complex situation of child migration.

When asked in an interview with Patricia Correa whether *Cuando llegues al otro lado* could be called entirely fictional, Osorio Gumá—who is a psychologist for both children and adults—responded that "it's in a sort of intermediate land. What's happening with child migration is real, but of course it's a fiction because it's a story in which the characters and events are invented [...] Sometimes it's much easier to access complicated situations—difficult to explain and observe because they're so painful—through fiction." In *Cuando llegues al otro lado*, a meticulously-researched story is told from the point of view of two young people who cross the desert between Mexico and the U.S, offering yet another angle through which to access this important story.

This novel offers an alternate narrative to the dehumanizing rhetoric used by U.S. governing institutions to describe the children who journey from their communities in Mexico and Central America "to the other side," often to reunite with their families or to flee dangers exacerbated by U.S. political actions.

To counter harmful stereotyped depictions—literary and otherwise—of people like Gregorio, Emilia, and Mamá Lochi, it is important to make space for novels that treat migrant and Mexican characters as what they are: complex, nuanced people with humanity and heart. Mariana Osorio Gumá's *Cuando llegues al otro lado* is one of those novels.

The conceit of the book is that Mamá Lochi has told Emilia to write it: "*Calandria, when you're very very far away, don't forget to sketch onto paper the story you have inside: that of your homeland, that of your dead.*" Much like Emilia's task of bringing her story across the U.S.-Mexico border, translating this novel from Spanish to English—and publishing it with a U.S.-Mexico border-based press with a history of publishing important Latinx literary art—is a way to remember and honor the voices that don't always have the opportunity to share their stories with an English-speaking and-reading public.

To bring this novel to "the other side" is to recognize that it belongs in an inclusive and necessarily diverse American literary tradition: one that strives to step over the (linguistic, national, and cultural) borders that fragment a rich community of traditions and stories." – **Cecilia Weddell, translator of *When You Get to the Other Side***

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Mamá Lochi transform a trauma in her life (being struck by lightning) and turn it into an asset, or superpower, for herself and grandchildren?
2. What does Mamá Lochi teach Emilia and Gregorio about respecting the natural world and spirits?
3. What stands out to you about the relationship between Emilia and Gregorio?
4. What does family mean to Mamá Lochi? What does family mean to Emilia and Gregorio? Do you think their definition is the same? Why or why not?
5. What does home mean to Emilia and Gregorio? How does their definition of home evolve from the beginning to end of the story?
6. What does the title *When You Get to the Other Side* mean to you after reading? Why do you think the author chose this particular title? Which border do you think this title refers to? Why?
7. The main narrative is interwoven with flashbacks of Mamá Lochi. How does this impact your reading of the story? Why do you think the author decided to present the story this way rather than chronologically?
8. Why do you think Emilia and Gregorio's father ultimately rejects them? What do Emilia and Gregorio represent to him?
9. Emilia and Gregorio draw supernatural abilities and strength from their relationship with their abuela, their connection to the natural world, and their culture. How do these sources help them deal with situations that are scary or difficult?
10. Describe the multiple borders presented in the book that multiple characters face and cross.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Fiction

Where We Come From by Oscar Casares

The Gringo Champion by Aura Xilonen

Illegal: A Disappeared Novel by Francisco X. Stork

The Everything I Have Lost by Sylvia Zéleny (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-everything-i-have-lost>)

Lost Children Archives by Valeria Luiselli

Nonfiction

Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions by Valeria Luiselli

Unaccompanied by Javier Zamora

The Devil's Highway: A True Story by Luis Alberto Urrea

Children of the Land by Marcelo Hernandez Castillo

The Undocumented Americans by Karla Cornejo Villavicencio

The Distance Between Us: A Memoir by Reyna Grande

The Shadow of the Wall: Violence and Migration on the U.S.-Mexico Border edited by Jeremy Slack, Daniel E. Martínez, and Scott Whiteford

Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juarez, 1893–1923 by David Dorado Romo (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/ringside-seat-to-a-revolution>)

“Landscape Analysis: Human Trafficking for the Purpose of Labor Exploitation in Mexico.” *Polaris*, March 17, 2021 (<https://polarisproject.org/resources/landscape-analysis-human-trafficking-for-the-purpose-of-labor-exploitation-in-mexico/>)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND TRANSLATOR

Mariana Osorio Gumá is a psychoanalyst and writer. She was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1967, and has lived in Mexico since 1973. She studied Psychology at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana and holds a Master’s degree in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy from the Centro Eleia de Actividades Psicológicas. She is also a graduate of the Escuela Dinámica de Escritores. In 2014 she was awarded the Premio Literario Lipp La brasserie for her novel *Tal vez vuelvan los pájaros*.

She is the author of the novels *El paraíso de las moscas*, *Tal vez vuelvan los pájaros*, *Escucha las sombras bajo el palmar*, *Fuera de serie*, and *Cuando llegues al otro lado*; the short-story collection *Las siete vidas de un gato*; the young adult novel *Las esencias de Sabina*; and the book of nonfiction *Hablemos de violencia: un monstruo de mil cabezas*. She has contributed chapters to the academic monographs *Sujeto, inclusión y diferencia* and *Nuevas miradas a la historia de la infancia en América Latina*, and to the essay collection *Imaginario*. Her essays and short stories have appeared in various magazines and journals, like *Teseo Amerpi*, *Fem*, *Tramas*, *Piso 7*, *K Pensamiento y Literatura*, *La palabra y el hombre*, *Revista de la Universidad Veracruzana*, and *Carta psicoanalítica* online.

Prizes and distinctions:

- Winner, Premio Literario Lipp La brasserie 2014: *Tal vez vuelvan los pájaros*
- Recommended book, Premio Fundación Cuatrogatos 2020: *Las siete vidas de un gato*
- Books selected by IBBY (International Board on Books for Young people): *Escucha las sombras bajo el palmar*, *Tal vez vuelvan los pájaros*, *Las siete vidas de un gato*

Cecilia Weddell is a writer, editor, and translator. She has a Ph.D. in Editorial Studies from Boston University, where she translated the newspaper essays of Rosario Castellanos and earned a graduate certificate in Latin American Studies. Her translations from Spanish have been published in journals including *World Literature Today*, *Latin American Literature Today*, and *Literary Imagination*. An associate editor at *Harvard Review*, she is from El Paso, TX.