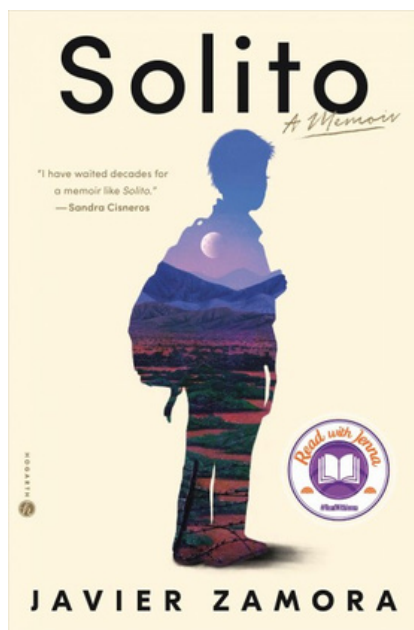


Summary

Javier Zamora's *adventure* is a three-thousand-mile journey from his small town in El Salvador, through Guatemala and Mexico, and across the U.S. border. He will leave behind his beloved aunt and grandparents to reunite with a mother who left four years ago and a father he barely remembers. Traveling alone amid a group of strangers and a "coyote" hired to lead them to safety, Javier expects his trip to last two short weeks.

At nine years old, all Javier can imagine is rushing into his parents' arms, snuggling in bed between them, and living under the same roof again. He cannot foresee the perilous boat trips, relentless desert treks, pointed guns, arrests and deceptions that await him; nor can he know that those two weeks will expand into two life-altering months alongside fellow migrants who will come to encircle him like an unexpected family.

A memoir as gripping as it is moving, *Solito* provides an immediate and intimate account not only of a treacherous and near-impossible journey, but also of the miraculous kindness and love delivered at the most unexpected moments. *Solito* is Javier Zamora's story, but it's also the story of millions of others who had no choice but to leave home.



About the Author

Javier Zamora was born in La Herradura, El Salvador in 1990. When he was a year old, his father fled El Salvador due to the US-funded Salvadoran Civil War (1980-1992). His mother followed her husband's footsteps in 1995 when Javier was about to turn five. Zamora was left at the care of his grandparents who helped raise him until he migrated to the US when he was nine. His first poetry collection, Unaccompanied (Copper Canyon Press, September 2017), explores some of these themes.

In his debut New York Times bestselling memoir, SOLITO (Hogarth, September 2022), Javier retells his nine-week odyssey across Guatemala, Mexico, and eventually through the Sonoran Desert. He travelled unaccompanied by boat, bus, and foot. After a coyote abandoned his group in Oaxaca, Javier managed to make it to Arizona with the aid of other migrants.

Zamora was a 2018-2019 Radcliffe Fellow at Harvard University and holds fellowships from CantoMundo, Colgate University (Olive B. O'Connor), MacDowell, Macondo, the National Endowment for the Arts, Poetry Foundation (Ruth Lilly), Stanford University (Stegner), and Yaddo. He is the recipient of a 2017 Lannan Literary Fellowship, the 2017 Narrative Prize, and the 2016 Barnes & Noble Writer for Writers Award for his work in the Undocupoets Campaign. Javier lives in Tucson, AZ.

Discussion Questions

- “Trip. My parents started using that word about a year ago—‘one day, you’ll take a trip to be with us. Like an adventure.’” The result is a harrowing migration story, a narrative that is immediate and intimate, in which the reader is essentially there, in the boy’s shoes and inside his head. What did you learn through Javier Zamora’s experience? What surprised or shocked you?
- This memoir is told from the perspective of the author as a nine-year-old boy. How do you think that adds to the narrative? Would the book have a different effect if it was the story of an adult’s journey?
- From Don Dago to others who remain unnamed, Javier relies on a network of coyotes to get him to America. What was your initial opinion on these coyotes? Did it change over the course of the memoir?
- There are many legs to this journey: boat, bus, on foot. Describe the ways each leg was uniquely challenging and dangerous.
- The journey wasn’t just physically taxing, but mentally, too. Discuss all that Javier—as a young child—has to memorize throughout the ordeal, from Mexican cities to political facts. Why might he have to pretend he is Mexican?
- Aside from Javier, which characters stayed with you, and why?
- The author is a poet. How do you think this serves the story he tells, and how does it affect the interplay between intense circumstances and beautiful images and writing?
- The natural world is a character itself in *Solito* — the animals, the plants, the landscape, the full moon, the sunrise — particularly in the scenes in the desert. Which natural elements stood out for you, and why?

Discussion Questions cont'd

- How do you think Javier survived during the seven-week journey? How did you think he sustained himself mentally and emotionally?
- How does Javier change throughout the book?
- Solito is set in 1999, 23 years ago — and yet we still need immigration reform. Name three ways you think the American immigration system can be more efficient and humane. Can the existing system even be changed?
- Javier's story is also the story of millions who have had no choice but to leave home. Have you or someone you've known faced similar circumstances? If so, how has this shaped your life or theirs?
- How much did you know about America's immigration system before reading Solito? Did your view of the issue change? Why or why not?
- Toward the beginning of the memoir, Javier lists all the ways he and his mother tried to immigrate legally. Discuss how these attempts are thwarted.
- What could you or your neighbors do to welcome immigrant families into your community?
- How did you feel at the end of "Solito"?