



HUMMINGBIRDS

DELVE DEEPER READING LIST



This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Jennifer Gibson of the St. Louis County Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary *Hummingbirds*.

About the film:

In *Hummingbirds*, Silvia and Beba tell their own coming-of-age story, transforming their hometown on the Texas-Mexico border into a wonderland of creative expression and activist hijinks. Filmed collaboratively over the final summer of their fleeting youth, their cinematic self-portrait celebrates the power of friendship and joy as tools of survival and resistance. Grand Prize, 2023 Berlinale Generation.

Contributors

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ADULT NON-FICTION

Agustin, Rafael. *Illegally Yours: A Memoir*. Grand Central Publishing, 2022.

A funny and poignant memoir about how as a teenager, TV writer Rafael Agustin (Jane The Virgin) accidentally discovered he was undocumented and how that revelation turned everything he thought he knew about himself and his family upside down.

Bonansinga, Kate. *Curating at the Edge: Artists Respond to the U.S./Mexico Border*. University of Texas Press, 2013.

Located less than a mile from Juárez, the Stanlee and Gerald Rubin Center for Visual Arts at the University of Texas at El Paso is a non-collecting institution that serves the Paso del Norte region. In *Curating at the Edge*, Kate Bonansinga brings to life her experiences as the Rubin's founding director, giving voice to a curatorial approach that reaches far beyond the limited scope of "border art" or Chicano art. Instead, Bonansinga captures the creative climate of 2004–2011, when contemporary art addressed broad notions of destruction and transformation, irony and subversion, gender and identity, and the impact of location on politics.

Cantú, Francisco. *The Line Becomes a River: Dispatches from the Border*. Riverhead Books, 2018.

For Francisco Cantú, the border is in the blood: his mother, a park ranger and daughter of a Mexican immigrant, raised him in the scrublands of the Southwest. Haunted by the landscape of his youth, Cantú joins the Border Patrol. He and his partners are posted to remote regions crisscrossed by drug routes and smuggling corridors, where they learn to track other humans under blistering sun and through frigid nights. They haul in the dead and deliver to detention those they find alive.

Grande, Reyna. *The Distance Between Us*. Atria Books, 2012.

Born in Mexico and raised by her grandparents after her parents left to find work in the U.S., at nine years old, Reyna enters the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant to live with her father. Filled with hope, she quickly realizes that life in America is far from perfect. Her father isn't the man she dreamed about all those years in Mexico. His big dreams for his children are what gets them across the border, but his alcoholism and rage undermine all his hard work and good intentions. Reyna finds solace from a violent home in books and writing, inspired by the Latina voices she reads. After an explosive altercation, Reyna breaks away, going on to become the first person in her family to obtain a higher education, earning a B.A. and then an M.F.A. in Creative Writing.

Guerrero, Jean. *Cruz: A Cross-Border Memoir*. One World, 2018.

From renowned journalist Jean Guerrero, here is the haunting story of a daughter's mission to save her father from his demons and to save herself from destruction. Marco Antonio was raised in Mexico, then migrated to California, where he met Jean's mother, Jeannette, a Puerto Rican woman just out of med school. Marco is a self-taught genius at building things—including mythologies about himself and the

hidden forces that drive us. When he goes on the run, Jean follows and embarks on an investigative journey between cultures and languages, the earthly and the mystical, truth and fiction.

Hendricks, Tyche. *The Wind Doesn't Need a Passport: Stories from the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands*. University of California Press, 2010.

Award-winning journalist Tyche Hendricks has explored the U.S.-Mexico borderlands by car and by foot, on horseback, and in the back of a pickup truck. She has shared meals with border residents, listened to their stories, and visited their homes, churches, hospitals, farms, and jails. In this dazzling portrait of one of the least understood and most debated regions in the country, Hendricks introduces us to the ordinary Americans and Mexicans who live there—cowboys and Indians, factory workers and physicians, naturalists and nuns. A new picture of the borderlands emerges, and we find that this region is not the dividing line so often imagined by Americans, but is a common ground alive with the energy of cultural exchange and international commerce, burdened with too-rapid growth and binational conflict, and underlain with a deep sense of history.

Luiselli, Valeria. *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions*. Coffee House Press, 2017.

Structured around the forty questions Luiselli translates and asks undocumented Latin-American children facing deportation, *Tell Me How It Ends* (an expansion of her 2016 Freeman's essay of the same name) humanizes these young migrants and highlights the contradiction of the idea of America as a fiction for immigrants with the reality of racism and fear both here and back home.

Martinez, Domingo. *Boy Kings of Texas: A Memoir*. Lyons Press, 2012.

Domingo Martinez lays bare his interior and exterior worlds as he struggles to make sense of the violent and the ugly, along with the beautiful and the loving, in a Texas border town in the 1980s. Partly a reflection on the culture of machismo and partly an exploration of the author's boyhood spent in his sister's hand-me-down clothes, this book delves into the enduring, complex bond between Martinez and his deeply flawed but fiercely protective older brother, Daniel.

Sánchez, Erika L. *Crying in the Bathroom: A Memoir*. Viking, 2022.

Growing up as the daughter of Mexican immigrants in Chicago in the '90s, Erika L. Sánchez was a self-described pariah, misfit, and disappointment—a foul-mouthed, melancholic rabble-rouser who painted her nails black but also loved comedy and dreamed of an unlikely life as a poet. Twenty-five years later, she's now an award-winning novelist, poet, and essayist, but she's still got an irrepressible laugh, an acerbic wit, and singular powers of perception about the world around her.

Thorpe, Helen. *Just Like Us: The True Story of Four Mexican Girls Coming of Age in America*. Scribner, 2011.

Just Like Us tells the story of four high school students whose parents entered this country illegally from Mexico. We meet the girls on the eve of their senior prom in Denver, Colorado. All four of the girls have grown up in the United States, and all four want to live the American dream, but only two have

documents. As the girls attempt to make it into college, they discover that only the legal pair sees a clear path forward. Their friendships start to divide along lines of immigration status.

Villavicencio, Karla Cornejo. *The Undocumented Americans*. One World, 2021.

Looking beyond the flashpoints of the border or the activism of the DREAMers, Cornejo Villavicencio explores the lives of the undocumented—and the mysteries of her own life. She finds the singular, effervescent characters across the nation often reduced in the media to political pawns or nameless laborers. The stories she tells are not deferential or naively inspirational but show the love, magic, heartbreak, insanity, and vulgarity that infuse the day-to-day lives of her subjects.

ADULT FICTION

Cantú, Norma E. *Canícula: Snapshots of a Girlhood en la Frontera*. University of New Mexico Press, 1995.

Canícula--the dog days--a particularly intense part of the summer when most cotton is harvested in South Texas. In Norma Cantú's fictionalized memoir of Laredo in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, it also represents a time between childhood and an as yet unknown adulthood. Actual snapshots and the author's re-created memories allow readers to experience the pivotal events of this world--births, deaths, injuries, fiestas, rites of passage.

Cásares, Oscar. *Brownsville*. Little, Brown, and Company, 2003.

At the country's edge, on the Mexican border, Brownsville, Texas, is a town like many others. It is a place where people work hard to create better lives for their children, where people bear grudges against their neighbors, where love blossoms only to fade, and where the only real certainty is that life holds surprises.

Cásares, Oscar. *Where We Come From*. Knopf, 2019.

From a distance, the towns along the U.S.-Mexican border have dangerous reputations, and Brownsville is no different. But to twelve-year-old Orly, it's simply where his godmother Nina lives—and where he is being forced to stay the summer after his mother's sudden death. Nina, however, has a secret: she's providing refuge for a young immigrant boy named Daniel, for whom traveling to America has meant trading one set of dangers for another. Separated from the violent human traffickers who brought him across the border and pursued by the authorities, Daniel must stay completely hidden. And Orly's arrival threatens to put them all at risk of exposure.

Cisneros, Sandra. *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1992.

A collection of stories by Sandra Cisneros, the celebrated bestselling author of *The House on Mango Street* and the winner of the 2019 PEN/Nabokov Award for Achievement in International Literature. The lovingly drawn characters of these stories give voice to the vibrant and varied life on both sides of the Mexican border with tales of pure discovery, filled with moments of infinite and intimate wisdom.

del Paso, Nati. *Women of Fire and Snow: Short Stories*. BookBaby, 2021.

"Women of Fire and Snow" is a riveting collection of contemporary stories of women straddling the Mexican-American border while finding their place and voice. Cultural identity, gender violence, forced migration, sacrifice, love, and resiliency frame suspenseful tales where realism is tempered by the supernatural and mystical.

Herrera, Yuri. *Signs Preceding the End of the World. And Other Stories*, 2015.

Signs Preceding the End of the World is one of the most arresting novels to be published in Spanish in the last ten years. Yuri Herrera does not simply write about the border between Mexico and the United States and those who cross it. He explores the crossings and translations people make in their minds and language as they move from one country to another, especially when there's no going back.

Urrea, Luis Alberto. *The Water Museum*. Little, Brown, and Company, 2015.

Examining the borders between one nation and another, between one person and another, Urrea reveals his mastery of the short form. This collection includes the Edgar-award winning "Amapola" and his now-classic "Bid Farewell to Her Many Horses," which had the honor of being chosen for NPR's "Selected Shorts" not once but twice.

YOUNG ADULT NONFICTION

Fennell, Saraciea J. *Wild Tongues Can't Be Tamed: 15 Voices from the Latinx Diaspora*. Flatiron Books, 2024.

Dive into *Wild Tongues Can't Be Tamed*, a thought-provoking anthology filled with enlightening essays and vivid narratives from the heart of the Latinx diaspora. Handpicked by the founder of The Bronx Is Reading, Saraciea J. Fennell, this compilation is a powerful examination of the diverse aspects of Latinx identity, with a spotlight on prevailing myths and misconceptions. Extracting hard-hitting themes of reality, these words echo with stories ranging from personal tales of love and grief, cultural memories forged in kitchens, serenades of ghost stories, tales of travels, intricate dialogues on identity, addiction, racism and anti-Blackness.

Longoria, Margarita. *Living Beyond Borders: Growing up Mexican in America*. Viking Books for Young Readers, 2022.

In this mixed-media collection of short stories, personal essays, poetry, and comics, this celebrated group of authors share the borders they have crossed, the struggles they have pushed through, and the two cultures they continue to navigate as Mexican Americans. *Living Beyond Borders* is at once an eye-opening, heart-wrenching, and hopeful love letter from the Mexican American community to today's young readers.

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Bowles, David. *Me Dicen Güero: Poemas de un Chavo de la Frontera / They Call Me Güero: A Border Kid's Poems*. Vintage Español, 2020.

Güero tiene doce años y es mexicano y americano al mismo tiempo. Sabe sentirse en casa en ambos lados del río, y en su vida hay tanto español como inglés. Güero ha comenzado el séptimo año en la escuela, y su profe de inglés hace que hasta los poemas suenen cool. Güero es como llaman a los chicos como él: pálidos. Pero no te equivoques, nuestro héroe pelirrojo y con pecas es puro mexicano, como el Canelo Álvarez. Además, Güero es un nerd —lector, gamer, músico— que se junta con una banda de inadaptados como él: Los Bobbys. Como todos los chicos de su edad, Los Bobbys se meten en problemas y, ¡hasta les gustan las chicas! Pero bueno, ¡cuidado con Joanna! Es dura como ninguna.

Diaz, Alexandra. *The Crossroads*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2018.

After crossing Mexico into the United States, Jaime Rivera thinks the worst is over. Starting a new school can't be that bad. Except it is, and not just because he can barely speak English. While his cousin Ángela fits in quickly, with new friends and after-school activities, Jaime struggles with even the idea of calling this strange place "home." His real home is with his parents, abuela, and the rest of the family; not here where cacti and cattle outnumber people, where he can no longer be himself—a boy from Guatemala.

Mickelson, Marcia Argueta. *Where I Belong*. Carolrhoda Lab, 2021.

Guatemalan-American high school senior Milagros "Millie" Vargas has lived in Corpus Christi, Texas, since her parents sought asylum there when she was a baby. Now a citizen, Millie cares for her younger siblings while her mom works as a housekeeper for the wealthy Wheeler family. She is disturbed by what is happening to asylum-seekers at the U.S.-Mexico border, but doesn't see herself as an activist or a change-maker. Then Mr. Wheeler, a U.S. Senate candidate, mentions Millie's achievements in a campaign speech about "deserving" immigrants, and her family is placed at the center of a statewide immigration debate. Millie must consider her place in the country that she believed was home.

BOOKS FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS AND CHILDREN

Briseño, Stephen. *The Notebook Keeper: A Story of Kindness From The Border*. Random House Studio, 2022.

After traveling to Tijuana, Mexico, Noemi and her mother are denied entry at the border and must find the refugee in charge of the notebook, an unofficial ledger of those waiting to cross into the United States.

Carlson, Lori Marie (ed.). *Cool Salsa: Bilingual Poems on Growing Up Latino in the United States*. Square Fish, 2013.

Growing up Latino in America means speaking two languages, living two lives, learning the rules of two cultures. Cool Salsa celebrates the tones, rhythms, sounds, and experiences of that double life. Here are poems about families and parties, insults and sad memories, hot dogs and mangos, the sweet syllables of Spanish and the snag-toothed traps of English. Here is the glory—and pain—of being Latino American.

Morales, Yuyi. *Dreamers*. Neal Porter Books/Holiday House, 2018.

This lovingly-illustrated picture book memoir looks at the myriad gifts migrantes bring with them when they leave their homes. It's a story about family. And it's a story to remind us that we are all dreamers, bringing our own strengths wherever we roam. Beautiful and powerful at any time but given particular urgency as the status of our own Dreamers becomes uncertain, this is a story that is both topical and timeless.