

Author Nicole Schulz

Prompt 4: In a well-reasoned essay supported by specific examples from *Enrique's Journey*, illustrate how Enrique's and/or Lourdes' stories defy the stereotypes many people believe about illegal immigrants.

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There is a stigma attached to Hispanic immigrants in the United States. Many view them as sneaky freeloaders who have come into the country to steal jobs and hurt the economy. In the novel *Enrique's Journey* author Sonia Nazario beautifully shatters this stereotype by illustrating how these immigrants are not attempting to take anything away from legal citizens of the United States. Through different scenarios, Nazario presents these characters as desperate people striving to earn a better life for themselves and their families.

The first glimpse given of a character's drive toward an improved life is shown through Lourdes in the line, "She enters at night through a rat-infested Tijuana sewage tunnel and makes her way to Los Angeles." (Nazario 8). The passage proceeds to relate how Lourdes was scammed by a smuggler and was forced to hide from the police until she could find work and fake credentials. The pure disgust that the passage invokes in the reader's mind gives a new perspective on what this mother is willing to risk to enter the United States. Lourdes put every hope and dream into America where she thought she could find work because it was her only chance to support her family. The lengths she is willing to go through, crawling through sewage and putting her life in the hands of unctuous smugglers, reveals the dedication and strength of character Lourdes possesses. She is willing to do whatever it takes. The same is seen later when Enrique describes how immigrants are willing to trek through burning deserts for days with no water to reach a boarder not patrolled. However, the sacrifice goes beyond getting into the

country. The circumstance that wounds Lourdes more than the physical trials she had to endure to get an American job is that she had to abandon her children in order to reach the job opportunities. Even though she had to leave them in order to accomplish her goal of providing for them, the contrast of caring for the little girl from Beverly Hills and her own children proves too much for Lourdes to handle. Often times Hispanic workers are regarded as cheap labor who exist for Americans to exploit. The character Lourdes brings a sense of humanity and compassion to all immigrant parents struggling to feed their children.

An image that provokes deeper thought is that of the immigrants making their way through Mexico by train. Enrique looks on as men, women, and children put irrevocable trust in God to lead them safely to a better life. "At stops, they kneel along the tracks, asking God for help and guidance. They ask him to keep them alive until they reach el Norte." (Nazario 102). This group of people is defined by the dangers that keep them from their destination. That they put their faith so squarely in God while so many forces are pulling against them almost gives their tale a Biblical edge. The fact that human decency and God is all these immigrants have to trust their fate to could only leave the most cynical and coldhearted person unsympathetic towards their cause. Enrique observes these people believing in God because God is all they have. There are flashes of human compassion when the trains pass through villages that give food and clothes to the immigrants, displaying how these people are all bound by common troubles and want to help those who have a chance of earning to a better life. The disparity between those who aid the immigrants in their plight and the individuals who are unnecessarily cruel is shocking. The detached manner in which immigrants are treated is chilling. "Some are shot by ranchers as they try to beg or steal food or drink." (Nazario 163). These starving people are hunted down like animals by dogs and treated worse by border control and locals.

Immigration used to be highly encouraged in the United States. Diversity was viewed as a good thing and offering a better life for anyone who was willing to work for it was a point of personal pride for Americans. However, in recent years immigration has taken on a whole new connotation. Immigrants are seen as threatening and dangerous at worse while inconvenient at least. This novel does a spectacular job of reaching past the cliché surface issues of immigration and delves into what it means when people are forced to make a decision in the best interest of themselves and their families. Whatever the reader's stance on immigration is, this novel's foremost point was to reestablish that these are real people, and they deserve to be treated as such.