

# **Coyotes: A Journey Through the Secret World of America's Illegal Aliens Study Guide**

**Coyotes: A Journey Through the Secret World of America's Illegal Aliens by Ted Conover**

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## Plot Summary

Journalist Ted Conover was in his late twenties and working on a story in Mexico about the impact of illegal immigration on both the Mexican and American societies when he was told that describing a border crossing was difficult. An old man told Ted that to truly appreciate a crossing, a person had to experience it. Ted set out to do that, meeting up first with a young Mexican named Alonso. Together, the two men were picked up by coyotes, a group of men who specialize in helping Mexicans cross the border illegally. In a leaky raft, they were ferried across the river separating the two countries, and Ted soon found himself making friends with others who had also endured the crossing in the hope of finding a better life in America.

Over the following months, Ted continued to follow various groups. He traveled from the orange and lemon groves of Phoenix to the crowded industrial neighborhoods of L.A. From there he made his way back to Phoenix and later caught a ride in a beat-up station wagon headed to Florida. The trip, described by Ted as having an average speed of twenty-five miles per hour, taxed Ted's patience, but his Mexican counterparts didn't understand his impatience. Ted next traveled back to Mexico, was delayed when the group is captured by the police trying to cross with another group of Mexicans, and went on to make a successful crossing over the coming days.

Ted learned about the people who made up the illegal alien immigration movement. He said that they are hard-working and that he'd welcome them as neighbors. He said they have the ambition normally approved of in Americans but lack the ability to better themselves without making the trip across the border. Some he met remained for the months of a particular growing season and others settled in, made homes and lives for themselves, and remained indefinitely. Some wanted to send money home and others see the work as a way to buy things for themselves.

Always, there was the fear of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. While the immigrants were fearful of being arrested and/or deported, many considered the adventure and money well worth the risk. One mother told Ted that her son was arrested in Texas and spent a month in jail there, but that the son hadn't counted it a huge ordeal, talking about his freedom to move around among the other prisoners and to talk with them. In addition, those crossing the border and those who have arrived were often the target of crimes. Because they were unwilling to call on the police for help, they were victimized more than they might otherwise be. They were also unwilling to call attention to themselves and so often give in to demands for money, extortion or other crimes rather than risk police intervention.

Ted also learned about the impact on the Mexican economy and culture. While many of the young men of working age were rushing to make their way across the border, the wives, girlfriends and children were left at home to try to survive the poverty and, more importantly, the loneliness.



# The Gringo and the Mexicano

## The Gringo and the Mexicano Summary and Analysis

Ted Conover met up with a young Mexican boy named Alonso and the two men came up with a plan to cross the American border together. As the story opens, the two were in an old hut awaiting the arrival of "coyotes," men who will - for a price - help Alonso and Ted cross the border into the United States. Ted then recounted how he'd come to this point. He said that he had been waiting for a bus in San Luis Potosi, located in the central part of the country, when he'd first met Alonso. Alonso revealed that he'd cross the border the first time at fourteen and that he was on his way to Texas again. Over the course of their conversation, Alonso revealed that he believes "everything" in America is better, including law enforcement and the economy. He also said that a person with dreams can't hope to reach those dreams in Mexico. It's Alonso who pointed out the massive number of men in the bus depot and said that they were all headed for an illegal border crossing. As they neared the border, Alonso noted the many factories put in place by American corporations seeking cheap Mexican labor and said that if he can't get across the border he could always come back here to find work.

Before Alonso and Ted found coyotes and got out of town, they were picked up by police and held in a police car for hours. Ted finally found a way to discretely pay a bribe and they were released. When they located coyotes, Ted - obviously not Mexican because of his blond hair and blue eyes - said that he was a criminal and won't be allowed to cross the bridge but wanted to get into America. The coyotes eventually bought the story and agreed to take them. Ted and Alonso were taken by car to a shack where they were told to wait. Eventually, a group of teens arrived with a rubber raft. They took turns blowing it up and then carried it to the river, where two of the boys paddle them across - quickly because the raft was leaking.

They arrived in Laredo, each with different emotions. Ted was relieved at being back in his own country and Alonso was aware that he had become an illegal immigrant and subjected to arrest anytime. They spent the night in a parking garage, and the next day Ted made a call for Alonso to a man named Larry, who'd promised Alonso a job if he should ever return to Houston. The decided that they'll go by bus and boarded a Greyhound. Alonso, fearing that immigration police would search the bus before it pulled out, went into the bathroom and hid behind the door, hoping that the open door would make it look as if no one was in there. However, the immigration police boarded and searched the bathroom. Ted said that he did his friend the favor of not looking at Alonso as he was escorted off the bus and onto a waiting immigration van.

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Ted Conover was in Mexico doing research for a story about illegal immigration when he met the young man named Alonso. In the "forward," Ted explained that he'd first come up with the idea for this book while researching railroad tramps. He said that he quickly



discovered that these Mexicans - illegal immigrants by necessity - were hardworking and wanted only to find work that meant the difference between sheer poverty and ample food and medicine for their families. Ted said that he'd endeavored not to offer information in the book that would make it easier for immigration officials to pick up any of those illegals he encountered. He said his goal was to provide a look at the human side of this situation.

The coyotes were interested in taking Alonso across the border, but most were wary as they realize that Ted was with Alonso. Ted, obviously American, was thought by most to be some sort of undercover immigration agent. This was one example of the reverse discrimination Ted experienced several times over the coming months. Ted said that the exchange of information was a touchy situation as the coyotes sought out potential customers. The coyotes were called this because they were loners and would, at the slightest provocation, slink away and disappear. Meanwhile, the customers - called "pollo", or "chickens" by the coyotes - were equally careful. To say outright that they were interested in going across the border was to admit that they had money. That made them targets for robbers.

Ted compared the two towns on either side of the Mexican/American border. He said that the Mexican side, right up to the border, was poor. The American side was also poor, but Ted said that it shone as prosperous compared to the Mexican side.

The majority of the illegal immigrants were from the poorer regions of Mexico, further south of the border. Ted would later learn that immigrants from various points in Mexico tended to go to specific points in America. Some headed for Florida while others preferred Arkansas, Arizona or California.



# Deep into the Orchard

## Deep into the Orchard Summary and Analysis

Ted arrived at Phoenix and found that there were orchards in a suburb called El Mirage. Ted learned that many of the workers camped out deep in the orchards in order to better avoid detection by immigration police. Ted met up with Lupe Sanchez who agreed to take Ted into one of the camps with the understanding that Ted would help teach English to the laborers. He and Ted arrived at a dilapidated house and discovered that there was a group of about fifty men living there. Sanchez talked some business with the men then introduced Ted. He assigned two men who know some English, Carlos and Victor, as Ted's "assistants." Ted soon learned that Carlos spent a semester at Oregon State University on an agronomy scholarship. There were several others who were also fairly well educated, but all say they couldn't find suitable work in Mexico, even with an education.

Though there were fifty men sharing the house or camping in the immediate vicinity, they were segregated by their home towns and there was not a lot of intermingling. Carlos, Victor and the rest of their small group slept in an abandoned refrigeration unit. Ted was soon working daily with the Mexicans. They were taken from their camps to the orchards by a tractor driver named Nate. Upon arrival, each man grabbed a ladder from the trailer pulled behind the tractor and climbed a tree. There, they picked oranges as quickly as possible, collecting a ticket for each sack full of oranges they took to the overseer. Ted eventually incurred Nate's wrath and became more determined than ever to keep working in the fields with the rest of the men. Though he was always very tired, Ted set up a "class" a couple of nights each week and was surprised when almost every man - though all worked hard all day - attended. They cooked their own food, always with tortillas as a base and to take the place of a spoon for scooping up rice and salsa.

There came a time when Sanchez, citing that there were too many men camped in the house and surrounding area, ordered some of them leave, and Ted was among those who decided to go. Ted noted that the decision was based largely on a hierarchy of age and experience. When word of the layoffs spread, several "domestic coyotes" arrived. Travel for illegals was confusing and dangerous and coyotes were often employed to move groups from one place to another. Ted wanted to go along but the coyote refused and he was left behind. He planned to catch a plane to L.A. and try to catch up with the guys - including Carlos and Victor - there. Then he learned that there was a problem, that the coyote was stopped and that the young Mexicans all ran away. They escaped, but the coyote wanted his money and was looking for them. Ted found them at the one-room home of a man named Fortino. Fortino planned to take them to L.A. in a car they bought for three hundred dollars, but it barely made it fifty miles. The group then asked Ted to accompany them on an airplane and they began to make plans to try that.

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Sanchez said that he's worked at helping organize the laborers, though they were illegals, over the years. He said that the owners of the orchards contracted for a specific number of men. Those men worked every day the weather allowed. The problem at the camp at El Mirage was that the number of men had grown out of proportion to the contracted number who were supposed to be available for work. This, coupled with the fact that there was no running water at the house and that there had been a steady stream of men walking the mile or more to carry in drinking water attracted the attention of Immigration and prompted a raid. Following this raid, Sanchez ordered that the numbers be reduced and the men comply.

The first night in El Mirage, Ted was given the only bed in the entire camp. He was initially intent on trying to fit in and asked that he not be singled out for this honor but the men insisted and he, realizing the honor behind the gesture, gave in, but only for the first night. This was a balancing act he dealt with every day of his time with the Mexicans. He tried to fit in and sometimes managed to do so or was accepted by various individuals or groups, but the reader should keep in mind that Ted was something akin to a star in the midst of these people and it likely impacted how they acted and reacted around him.

Ted soon became friends with several of the Mexicans working in the orchard at El Mirage. He became especially close to Carlos and Victor. Carlos came up with the idea that Ted could be their guide into the airport. Carlos suggested that the group buy Ted's ticket if he served as their guide. It may seem that Ted had nothing to lose in this endeavor but he worried that, if caught, he'd be charged with aiding and abetting an illegal, a felony. Ted worried about this, but he also worried that he would let his friends down. He felt a sense of responsibility for them and feared that some mistake on his part will result in their being deported.

# Welcome to L.A.

## Welcome to L.A. Summary and Analysis

Ted took Victor, Ismael, Carlos, Timoteo to the airport. As soon as they stepped into the terminal, Timoteo was startled by the electric doors, which prompted Ted to wonder what else he might have forgotten to tell them about. The plan was for them to go in without seeming to be a single large group. Ted and Timoteo were near each other and Ted noted that Timoteo, dressed in a suit, looked the part of a foreign dentist. The others were also dressed in clothing that Ted believed will help them fit in better, though the others were more casual than Timoteo. The next problem occurred when a voice came over an intercom, announcing phone calls for someone. Ted said that those who speak no English stopped in their tracks, terrified that they've been spotted and not understanding that the voice was being broadcast all over the terminal. The next problem happened when they encountered the escalator. None of them had seen such a thing and all were fearful of stepping on. At this point there was no option for Ted to take the lead and offer instructions, which he did.

None of them particularly liked the experience, but they were moving onward to their boarding gate. There was a sign that alerted passengers to the penalties for carrying guns or making jokes about bombs and those who can't read English were immediately frightened again. The woman at the gate told the men to put their bags on the conveyor belt and walk through the metal detector and all of them, believing she's asked for identification, begin opening wallets. Ted again stepped in and intervened. They each put down their bags and stepped through and each set off the metal detector. Only then did Ted realize that each had a pocket filled with pesos and that the coins set off the metal detectors. Without further incident, they made it through the gate and boarded the plane.

They landed at Los Angeles but didn't want to wait around for someone to come to the airport and pick them up. They took a taxi to Santa Monica, where they stopped at a McDonald's and Carlos used a pay phone to try to reach a relative to come get them. They had to leave McDonald's before Carlos got an answer and stopped to try again at a hotel before making their way on to an all-night donut shop to wait for their ride. There, Ted was playing tic-tac-toe and then a grid game on paper when a man walked in and looked over Ted and the others. Ted mostly ignored the man, involved in the game, until the man hit him, seriously injuring Ted's eye. Ted ran after the man as soon as he could get up, yelling for police. There was a homeless woman in the donut shop and she assured him a few minutes later that the police had been called. None of the Mexicans with Ted chased after the man who'd hit Ted and he wondered why until he realized that they wanted, above all else, to avoid any confrontation with the police. Ted went outside to talk to the police who said that without witnesses, the man would likely be released. Ted said there weren't any witnesses and the police left with the man in custody.





Carlos had been unable to reach the relative, but another man agreed to come get them. He arrived and picked them up, though he was initially wary of Ted until the others told of Ted's role in getting them into town on an airplane. They arrived at the man's house to find that they were going to have to sleep in a van that night. Ted was so tired that he was almost immediately at the edge of sleep but the others were too excited and kept talking and laughing for some time. It was only after they arrived that Ted discovered that the man had charged them fifty dollars each for the ride. Ted was appalled, but Carlos assured him that they planned to cover his cost as a thank you for his efforts at getting them through the airport.

They soon met up with Carlos' relatives and made their way to a neighborhood called San Pedro, where a man named Martin had an outdoor welding shop. He created decorative ironworks at a reasonable price and had established a steady business. They spent the first few days recovering from their trip and then Martin took them out for dinner at McDonald's and an evening at a club. There was a pretty young girl there who acted interested in Ted, but he soon discovered that she only wanted marriage and the green card that would include. Martin was soon able to send for his wife and son. This meant all those who had been living in the house feel they were in the way and they soon began leaving. The men began finding jobs and an uncle helped them find an apartment. Timoeto worked as a janitor in a large office building, Carlos took on a job as an engraver in a trophy shop and Victor began working construction. Again, Ted was without a job because the employers were unwilling to hire an American and potentially cause problems with their Mexican work force. With no real prospects, Ted headed back to Phoenix to continue his research.

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Ted was never really sure why the man in the donut shop attacked him, but it can be assumed by his comments to Ted that it was because Ted was a white man talking with Mexicans. Ted was later told that if he'd been talking with blacks, the attack would likely have been more violent. Ted noted that the Mexican men he arrived in L.A. with were also fearful of blacks, though they'd known none personally and based their fears only on second-hand information and their own biases. Ironically, when they were new in L.A. and stopped at the motel to use the phone, there was a black man at the desk. He told them that they couldn't wait there because the owner wouldn't approve. He did, however, give Ted a five dollar bill and directions to the donut shop. Ted told the men that, but it didn't change their impression of blacks as a race. Ted noted that there was some truth to their biases, because groups of blacks and whites accosted the Mexicans whenever they were out and safety was only had in relatively large groups.

Ted encountered a bag lady at the donut shop. She was apparently the epitome of a bag lady by appearance and was taking up multiple seats with her bags of stuff. However, Ted soon discovered that she was working a crossword and had all the blanks filled in with the exception of a couple that Ted didn't know the answers to either. He learned that she'd traveled extensively with her husband years earlier and that she was an interesting character.



# Phoenix to Florida at 25 MPH

## Phoenix to Florida at 25 MPH Summary and Analysis

Ted returned to El Mirage and reacquainted with several of the men there. It was nearly the Christmas vacation which would mean five days off work. Some of the men were looking forward to the break as a time to relax or make a quick trip back to Mexico to visit family. Others saw it as wasted time. Some planned to make the trip to Florida, where there were rumored to be more jobs available. Ted decided that he'll try to make arrangements with a group to make that trip. He began working on it but found that the coyotes were reluctant to include him in travel plans even when the Mexicans didn't mind. At one point, Ted connected with a group who were living in the orchards and agreed to try to make arrangements with a coyote in return for being allowed to go along. He met with a coyote who called himself "The Viper" and made plans to meet again the following day with a group of the man who wanted to travel to Florida. However, he went to the orchard that night to find that the men were gone, already taken by another coyote.

Ted then learned that a man named Emilio Hernandez was making plans to go to Florida. Emilio worked at an orchard owned by a man named Smith and Ted arrived after work hours to find that the workers lived in a fenced compound that reminded Ted of a prison labor camp, though the fence was ostensibly designed to keep immigration officials from raiding the camp. Ted met with Emilio and several others, including a man named Maximo, who were planning to make the trip in a battered station wagon. Ted pointed out that, in the event of problems that require someone who can speak English, he would be an asset. He also had a driver's license. They agreed to let him come along.

Ted, having been stood up on several other trips, arrived very early so that he wouldn't be left. They set out and soon encounter bad weather. Some of the men were enamored with the sight of snow, having never seen it. However, they were soon facing dangerous icy roads. They had already discovered that the station wagon couldn't be safely driven more than fifty miles per hour and now they were slowing even more. Emilio was behind the wheel and Ted noted that Emilio didn't understand how to drive in the ice. Emilio soon lost control and they hit a snow bank. When the car was out, they asked Ted to drive because he had the most experience with those conditions. He agreed. Then the car heater quit and the ice piled up quickly on the windshield. Ted found a motel and convinced the group that spending the money for a night inside was a must.

The next day they were told by a mechanic that they needed a new battery and they paid the price for that, which fixed the heater. They were again making better time, but the roads were still dangerous and Emilio was driving when they found a semi parked in their lane. With a truck passing, they had no way to avoid a collision and hit the truck.



The driver was horrified that he was not on the shoulder and didn't want to call the police. The station wagon still ran and they left, though the headlights then didn't work.

They got off the Interstate in places where Emilio and Maximo feared immigration police and finally reached La Belle, Florida. The house where they'd expected to find friends was occupied by someone else and they parked deep in an orchard, dined on oranges and slept. The next day they found a man name Gutierrez who hired the group, including Ted. Gutierrez allowed them to sleep behind his house, and they feasted that evening on barbecue and beer. Ted said that the group remained together for awhile, but Emilio and two others were eventually caught and returned to Mexico while another man fell ill. Ted said another of the group, Arturo, began buying consumer goods and was never able to save any money like his friends.

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Ted sold Emilio and Maximo on allowing him to go along at least partly because he had a driver's license. However, both he and the Mexicans knew that driving put him in the position of being arrested as a coyote if they were caught by police. He finally decided that he would take the wheel anyway when they were dealing with the ice soon after setting out for Florida, because it was safer than having some of the inexperienced drivers in control. Ted said that, if they're caught, he might have been able to sell a police officer on the fact that a wreck was a distinct probability and that he'd done it in the interest of safety.

Ted got to know several of the men he travelled with, including Emilio. He said that Emilio seemed the most driven of all those traveling in the group. He was very skilled in the orange groves and picked other crops as well, but in the off-season when most of his friends returned to their homes in Mexico, he went on to find work elsewhere and remained in the United States. Ted was most amazed by the fact that Emilio was something of a workaholic but that in the car, with nothing to do but wait to arrive at the destination, he sat quietly and waited. Ted became antsy on this trip and hated the delays, but the men who had so much riding on arriving at their destination quickly were content to let the trip take however much time it took. Ted noted this as a cultural difference.



# In the Land of Avocados

## In the Land of Avocados Summary and Analysis

Ted was aboard the White Arrow, a "glorified school bus" that served Queretaro, City, north of Mexico City. The area was very rural and Ted noted that the bus was fully loaded with people, feed, furniture and "even a casket" that the bus driver said did contain a body. The road was steep and brutal and the trip tedious because of it. Ted was headed to Ahuacatlan because he wanted to visit with the families of the men who traveled routinely to America. He said that he felt there was something missing from his research because of this gap. Ted was to stay with a friend of Lupe Sanchez. The father of the family was Hilario and his wife's name was Lupe. Lupe was thirty-three but looked older because of the difficult life she led. Ted was to do some work for Hilario while visiting in Ahuacatlan, including driving a large truck.

Ted learned more here about the lives of the men who go regularly to America. Ted shared all aspects of their lives, eating with them and spending evenings with them. Hilario told Ted that many of the families urge their sons to go to America, seeing it as the only way they can realize their dreams. He said that a young man who goes to the United States can send money home but can also return with cash in their pockets - often more than the family would see at one time over an entire lifetime. Hilario told the story of a young man who returned and met his parents but they didn't recognize him because he'd changed over the course of his time away. Hilario said that often it is the other way around, with the young people not recognizing the parents.

Father Thomas Cano met with Ted to talk about his impressions of the regular travels of the men of the community. Father Thomas told Ted that the constant leaving has created a society of "widows and orphans" among those left behind. He said that women tried to fill the gap but weren't able. Furthermore, the men brought home sexually transmitted diseases that were unheard of until the constant travel to the United States. Father Thomas said the extra money earned by the men was important but that, overall, the society lost because of the travel.

Ted met up with several younger men, at home only for a short period of time. Jesus and Victor were two of the many, both residents of the area and both home for a short time. The two men were part of a soccer team called the Owls and had been state champions. He then encountered Jose, a man who had worked at Smith's farm in Arizona, and Jose was pleased to show that his young child had begun to be less afraid of him. They were joined by others and spent the evening at a bar. Ted noted that no one would let him pay for his own drinks and that he had more beer placed in front of him than he could drink. It was here that Ted learned that men worried about their wives while the men were away in the United States. The men feared that the wives would let another man move in with them because their husbands were absent. The men who went to the United States would send money home and that money would be used to support the wife and her lover.



The next Saturday Ted attended a soccer game and the Owl won. Over the following weeks, Ted was called on to play several times. As the men began to prepare to leave again for America, Ted was given a pair of shoes by the brother of a man who planned to travel with Ted's group. The brother presented the shoes with the hope that Ted would look out for the boy. One day a mother called out to Ted. She said that her sons made the trip regularly but that she still worried about them and that her worries were increased because another son wanted to make the trip on this particular year.

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While in Mexico, Ted learned about the lives and families of the men who travel annually to America. He said that he'd come to know many of these men after meeting them in America and that they'd each been important to his life and his story there, but that he hadn't really realized that these men were also important in their homes. They had families and friends who missed them when they are gone. Ted also learned that it was very common for a man to marry and leave a wife behind when he went to America. Often, the wife gave birth while the husband was in the United States and the husband returned months later, usually after the end of a particular growing season, and stayed only for a short time before returning to America. Often, the wife would be pregnant again by the time he left.

Ted said that another interesting aspect of the society created by the constant traveling of the young men was seen in the intermingling of the younger and older generations. In a typical community of this kind and time, the younger men would always have deferred to the elders and the older generation would never have given time for the young men to speak. However, the younger men were making a great deal of money when compared with what their fathers made and - more importantly - have had life experiences that most of the older men haven't had. This meant that the two generations were mingling in a way that was unheard of years earlier before the traveling became so prevalent.

On the appointed day, Ted and the others who were making the trip to America, gathered to wait for the White Arrow, the bus. There were several in the group and Ted knew that all of them had friends and family in the town. What struck Ted as odd was that there was no one there to see them off. He noted that it was probably too sad for those family members to be there for the immediate departure.



# Coming Into the Country; Epilogue

## Coming Into the Country; Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Ted returned to Queretaro with the group of Mexican men aboard the bus called the White Arrow. One of the men, a young Mexican named Jesus who had spent time with Ted over the previous weeks, told Ted that he'd been up very late the previous night with a girlfriend. Someone asked if it was Maria Elena, the mother of Jesus' two-year-old son, but he says he was with Evangelica. It's only then that Jesus revealed his plan, that he was to meet Evangelica near the border and that she planned to cross with them. The men changed busses and met up with Evangelica at Sonoita. Some of the group said there were many coyotes and that they would wait for the best possible price. They didn't want a long-distance courier but only sought a ride out of town and to be dropped in an area suitable for their desert crossing. A man named Placido had made the crossing on eight previous occasions and was the most experienced, and so became the group's leader. During this time of waiting, Jesus told Ted about the dangers they faced. He said that during the night, bandits were the most likely danger, but that during the day the police became a major problem. The group connected with another small group and the leader of that group, a man named Genaro, became the leader for all.

The double group found a ride to the place they planned to cross the desert but were stopped before they reach that place. They were taken to a police department and Ted was relieved to find that it was officials who were holding them. Ted was disguised for a time and several members of the group, including Placido, were beaten in an effort to get information. The officials discovered he was an American and he confirmed this with his identification. The officials called a commander and he ordered Ted to leave. Ted went outside and waited. Hours later, the rest of the men were outside the office, but Ted waited until the police left the station before he alerted them to his presence.

The groups were soon again on their way across the desert. They were well-equipped, carrying jugs of water and food as well as gloves and pliers. They made the crossing to an Indian reservation where Indians were hired to take them by car to a place where they met up with others willing to take them on the next leg of their journey. One of the men told Jesus that he was out of work and was a coyote in order to pay the bills.

They arrived at a place where the men had an old Cadillac stored. The car had been a gift from Farmer Edwards in Idaho and the men and Evangelica prepared to make the trip back across country to Idaho. They made the trip as far as Utah before they were stopped for speeding. Ted was held by immigration police for a full day but was released when the officials said they didn't believe a charge would stick. Four days later, Ted was in Phoenix and Jesus arrived, the rest of the group a short distance behind him. Placido made the trip from Idaho to Phoenix to pick up the group but it was obvious that the car wouldn't carry them all. Ted volunteered to stay behind.



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The Mexican men were not particularly religious but they consistently had the effects of Catholicism with them, cards with pictures of the Virgin Mary and crucifixes. Ted noted at one point that the crucifix was treated something like "Mexican travel insurance." At one point they had some chicken left from the night before but the men wouldn't eat anything but fish on Friday and threw the chicken away. During the trip in Mexico, they told Ted about their time at Farmer Edwards' home in Idaho and said that he'd "baptized" them in the swimming pool. When Ted asked how they'd reconciled this baptism to their faith, Jesus said that it was simply a matter of making the patron happy.

The crossing of the desert was brutal and Ted noted that at one point they were near the place where a group had died of thirst. One of the men touched a cactus and the others had to pull the spines out. They had begun prepared for this and other emergencies and had pliers among the items they carried. Ted told of encountering a rattlesnake and one of the boys killed it, skinned it and planned to use it as a hat band.

Ted concluded the book with the details of his trip to visit Farmer Edwards. He noted that the men had spoke of Edwards as a wealthy "patron," meaning that he was rich. Ted had expected that the man would live in a mansion, but found that the house was really quite modest and that the man probably had the vast majority of his money tied up in land. Ted went through the trailer where the Mexicans had lived, imaging the group living there and what their lives would be like as they returned to Mexico.

Ted much later learned that Carlos had been injured and had had his hand amputated. He managed to enroll in school after the accident. Maximo, who had traveled with Ted to Florida, had returned to Mexico. Evangelica and Jesus had a daughter a short time after returning to Mexico.



# Characters

## Ted Conover

Ted Conover is a journalist who wanted to tell the story of illegal immigration from the immigrants' perspective. Ted was able to fit in with the Mexicans he encountered and was soon accepted at face value. He learned that news of his presence tended to spread so that everyone knew who he was long before they personally met. He was innovative and daring to a point but continued to realize that he was in danger of being arrested for aiding and abetting the illegal immigrants, a felony in America. Ted was naïve at first about the way the system operates, and it took him some time to learn how to fit in and how to gain the experiences he wanted in order to write his book. Interestingly, Ted realized - at least to some degree - the prejudices faced by Mexicans but was shocked when he saw the reverse of that prejudice directed his way. He found himself attacked in L.A. just because he was sitting at a table and talking with a group of Mexicans, and was later told that if he'd been talking with blacks, the attack would likely have been much more serious. Ted was open to the experiences he sought, but even with this as his goal, he was sometimes beset by impatience and disappointment when things didn't work out. More than once he was refused transportation to some particular place because he was white. When the trip from Phoenix to Florida took a great deal longer than he'd expected, he was impatient and angry.

## Jesus

The young Mexican man who was in the village of Ahuacatlan when Ted was there. Jesus is also among those who travelled back to the border to cross with the group that included Ted. He took his girlfriend Evangelica with him on the trip, and Ted later learned that Evangelica was miserable during her stay in America. Jesus was typical of the young men of this time and place. He believed sexual prowess to be a vital trait and, though he had a son by a woman named Maria Elena, he had spent most of his time at home with Evangelica. Jesus is also typical in that he knew he was in serious trouble for taking Evangelica to America against her parents' wishes. His fear was very real and he knew that it was possible that her family would harm him upon his return to Mexico. Despite the fact that Jesus was desperate to have Evangelica with him, he didn't take care of her once they arrived in Mexico. He and the other men went out regularly but left Evangelica at the trailer they were living in at a particular job. Jesus is hard-working, like most men of this ethnicity, social situation and period.

## Alonso

The young boy who accompanied Ted on his first illegal crossing into the United States. Alonso was only fourteen on his first crossing and he and Ted made plans to go on to





Houston together. However, Alonso was picked up by immigration police before the bus left the station.

## Carlos

A young man who could speak limited English, Ted met him in El Mirage. Carlos was fairly well educated but said despite his education, he couldn't find a suitable job. Carlos, like most of the young men Ted met, was anxious to work. Ted remained with Carlos for the trip to California.

## Emilio Hernandez

A man who worked at Smith's orchard in El Mirage near Phoenix and who was reportedly making plans for a trip to Florida. Ted persuaded Emilio to allow him to go along because Ted could be an asset if there was need for someone who could speak English. Emilio and his friends set out in a car that cost very little, without a map or considering the weather, but believed they'd make it. Emilio knew little about driving in icy conditions, had a minor accident that could have been serious, and eventually turned the wheel over to Ted.

## Maximo

Another of those who made the trip from Phoenix to Florida in the beat-up station wagon with Ted. Maximo told Ted that there's no need for a road map because "we've done it before."

## Hilario

The man who lived in Ahuacatlan who allowed Ted to stay with his family. Hilario wanted to make things better in Mexico so that the young people would not feel the need to leave. Hilario said that many families encouraged their sons to leave, citing the fact that there was an opportunity to make more money than most families saw at one time ever. Hilario admitted to Ted that he had been to America when he was very young but had spent his adult life working to make Mexico better.

## Father Thomas Cano

The priest in the village in Ahuacatlan. Father Thomas said the regular movement of men from the village to America created an entire economy of "widows and orphans" of the people. He said that the regular leaving was a horrible situation for the community and brought in more problems than the extra money could possibly have solved. Those problems, according to Father Thomas, included sexually transmitted diseases.



## **Evangelica**

A young Mexican girl who decided to go with Jesus as Jesus and his group crossed the American border. She was determined to leave Mexico with Jesus, probably because she was enamored with the idea of the wonderful life she expected in America. Ted found her diary after she had returned to Mexico and her writing seemed to indicate her loneliness.

## **Farmer Edwards**

The man who owned the ranch in Idaho where Jesus, Evangelica and the others had stayed. Ted met Edwards after the men had left for the season and learned some about the lives of the men there from the farmer. Ted had believed that Edwards was a wealthy man from the descriptions of the men but finds the reality is that he is not as wealthy as Ted had expected.



## **Objects/Places**

### **San Luis Potosi**

Where Ted met up with Alonso for his first illegal crossing of the Mexican border.

### **Laredo**

Where Ted and Alonso went as soon as they arrived in the United States.

### **Phoenix**

Where Ted worked in the citrus orchards.

### **El Mirage**

The small town in Phoenix where the orchards were.

### **Santa Monica**

Where Ted was attacked while waiting for Carlos' relative to arrive and pick them up.

### **The White Arrow**

A "glorified school bus" used as a transportation vehicle in a very rural area of Mexico.

### **Ahuacatlan**

A very rural area where Ted went to visit the families of men who traveled routinely to the United States.

### **The Owls**

A soccer team in Mexico, they were the state champions at one point.

### **Sonoita**

The Mexican town where Ted and a group of men met up with Jesus' girlfriend, Evangelica.

## Idaho

Where Jesus, Evangelica and the others traveled to work on a ranch.



# Themes

## The Impact of Illegal Immigration

Ted set out to write the book with the idea that he wanted to know the impact of illegal immigration on society, both American society and Mexican society. He discovered some interesting facts, though he began his research by looking more closely at American society. He saw that many people hated the Mexicans. There were racial problems evident between blacks, whites and Mexicans. Ted tried on several occasions to get hired on where the Mexicans were working. Sometimes he was hired but more often he was denied. The employers who were hiring Mexicans didn't want Ted creating problems on their crews.

Ted then traveled to Mexico, where he learned about the impact of the immigration on the Mexicans. There he found that the men were important to their families and communities. They were fathers, sons and husbands, and their families were without them for months every year as the men traveled to America. The result was an emerging generation without the discipline that had ruled in previous generations. Often, the men arrived in Mexico, married or took a lover, and left the women for months at a time to cope with children and homes on their own. The women, lonely during these months, often took lovers of their own. Meanwhile, the men brought back sexually transmitted diseases. But Ted said that there are some positive points, including the money earned by the men who traveled routinely to the United States.

## Cultural Differences

Cultural differences becomes an important theme throughout the book, and these are seen mainly through the eyes of the author, Ted. However, Ted also points out some of those cultural differences through the eyes of others. For example, he is talking to a young Mexican man about the relationship between men and women. In Mexico, the young man is accustomed to seeing men behave aggressively toward women, and any man who doesn't is seen as something of an oddity. Ted himself has come to realize this cultural difference, but there comes a point when he tries to explain it to the young Mexican man. Ted says that he doesn't think the man really understands the reasoning behind Ted's explanation but that he does accept it, merely as a friend with a different perspective.

Among the more major of the cultural differences is the ability for the Mexican men to wait patiently for the next event. Ted tells about this when he and several others are in a car traveling from Phoenix to Florida. Ted is along for the ride. He is not going to starve waiting for the first paycheck after he arrives and really has nothing major to gain by arriving more quickly. However, he cites the time lost because the car is so beat up that they have to drive very slowly. The Mexican men tease him about this "lost time", and

Ted comes to realize that the Mexicans are almost always able to sit quietly and just wait, regardless of the situation, for the next event.

## **The Desire for Money**

One young Mexican told Ted that there was no way to realize dreams in Mexico and that the only real option for a person who wanted to better himself and his family was to go to America. Ted saw the effects of this mentality in that many families urged their young men to go to America. Despite the dangers, there was always the opportunity for a hard-working man to make a great deal more money than they could possibly make in Mexico. This desire for money, for the most part, is to make a better life. Sometimes, men traveled to America to earn money for medical attention that would otherwise not be available. This is seen in the case of Lupe and Hilario. Lupe had needed an operation and her brother had gone to Mexico to earn the money to pay for it. The money earned by the men also bought a better way of life for many of the families. This influx of money wasn't always a good thing, and Ted noted that some of the men become consumers, anxious to spend their money on various goods. This money, according to some, was vital, but others, including Father Thomas Cano, said the money isn't enough to make up for what it costs the families.

# Style

## Perspective

The story is written in first person from the perspective of the author, Ted Conover. In the forward, which is a personal message from Ted, he says that he has come to realize that the illegal immigrants have faces, emotions, dreams and families, and that it's easy to like them if one will open himself to the opportunity. This indicates a willingness on his part to be open to the opportunity. In fact, he does come to get to know the illegal immigrants he encounters during his research, and the reader should keep in mind that this might mean the information presented in this book is skewed to present the immigrants in the most favorable light. However, Ted's acceptance of the men he encounters might be countered, at least to some degree, by the fact that Ted is subjected to some of the problems that turn some people so wholeheartedly against the illegal immigrants. This is seen when Ted is talking to Alonso's friend in Houston. The man says that he'll give Alonso a job if he can make his way to Houston, but says that he isn't willing to hire Ted because Ted isn't Mexican. Ted says this is frustrating because he sees a job that he can do but isn't given a chance. Another potential problem in the legitimacy of this perspective is that the men Ted encounters knows that he is a journalist and that he's doing research for a book. It could be that the people he encounters deliberately keep him from specific information, but it doesn't really seem likely that Ted could have been kept away from the less-appealing side of life faced by the immigrants, considering the amount of time he spends among them. Overall, the first-person perspective is the only option really available to the author.

## Tone

The overall tone of the story is one of hope, though there is also a great deal of despair. The men Ted encounters during his research are, for the most part, merely seeking a better life, and hope they can fill that dream by living and working in America. Ted works alongside several of them at various points of the story, and though there is a near-constant fear of being arrested, the men and women are hard-working and excited for the opportunity to work hard in order to make dreams a reality. In one situation, Ted says that a group of men find work in a particular orchard but find that they are limited to only thirty-five or forty hours of work each week. They go looking for another job where they can work fifty or sixty hours a week instead. The book is presented in a fairly straight-forward manner. The vocabulary is not overly complex, but there are Spanish words and phrases thrown in. In most cases, these words and phrases are translated so that the reader doesn't have any problem understanding the book. Those few instances in which translations aren't provided are typically examples of very common phrases that anyone with a minimal grasp of the language will be able to understand. The instances in which there are no translations are often fairly unimportant and the reader who can't grasp these meanings will not be missing anything important to the story line.

## Structure

The story is divided into six chapters, a forward, an epilogue and an afterward. The chapters vary in length from twenty-eight to forty-eight pages. The chapters are titled "The Gringo and the Mexican," "Deep into the Orchard," "Welcome to L.A.," "Phoenix to Florida at 25 MPH," "In the Land of Avocados," and "Coming into the Country." The chapters are roughly divided into events and groups of people. The first, for example, includes the story of how Ted comes to meet a young boy named Alonso and to manage a crossing of the Rio Grande with him. The next covers Ted's introduction to a group of men who work in the orchards of Arizona. The chapters cover all aspects of the lives of the men and women Ted meets along the way, from their fears to their choices of entertainment. The Forward is written by Ted in May of 1987, shortly before the publication of the book and after his research. The Epilogue tells as much as Ted knows of the eventual whereabouts of the men he meets along the way. The Afterward gives his impressions of the situation overall. It's here that he points out that the law makes it a felony to lend money to an illegal immigrant or to otherwise provide safe harbor. He says that there's no real penalty for a person who hires someone who's an illegal immigrant. This statement somewhat dates the book, which was written in the late 1980s.





## Quotes

"A group of prostitutes we had passed out a store in the morning's drive out here had been pretty too. Somehow, I had not expected to find beauty in this town made of planks and corrugated tin."

The Gringo and the Mexicano, p. 4

"Strangely opposite emotions swept over Alonso and me as we walked those streets of Laredo. I suddenly felt a great excitement and wave of relief, a joy at being home again after so many weeks, out of the hands of the coyotes, away from Mexican law enforcement, back in a place, I thought, where I could explain myself out of most predicaments I might find myself in."

The Gringo and the Mexicano, p. 25

"Over the past few days I had absorbed much of the technique of citrus picking - and been thoroughly disabused of the notion that this was some kind of unskilled labor." Deep into the Orchard, p. 42

"By Friday, however, it was party time as usual, due to the return from the border, by various devious means, of all but one of the deportees."

Deep into the Orchard, p. 61

"As the beginning of our concourse came into view, I felt a newfound respect for coyotes: maybe they did overcharge, but this line of work took years off your life."

Welcome to L.A., p. 71

"Instead of seeing in me the things I thought she had, she had seen in me a ticket. I wasn't a sex object, but something sexier: a green card object, a hollow marriage object, a means to an end."

Welcome to L.A., p. 99

"The little they joked or horsed around made me realize how much this was an ordeal for the: everyone in the car, except for me, came from a land of sugarcane and avocados. The drive, for them, was nothing more than the unpleasant means to a Florida end - a dire passage to a warm and sunny place where they could work."

Phoenix to Florida at 25 MPH, p. 121

"Mexicans seemed to look at American men in much the same way we often look at Germans: they were precise, efficient, somewhat cold, too serious. It was interesting because, impatient toward the end of the drive, that was how I had felt with them - I was pushing the speed to the Squire's limit, not talking, maybe a little angry at how long it all was taking."

Phoenix to Florida at 25 MPH, p. 139



"I married a blonde, hoping I'd become a U.S. citizen - but she turned out to be a wetback, too, And now I'm back home, driving my burro."  
A Mexican song, In the Land of Avocados, p. 152

"All of us bought these cards, and, imitating the others, I hung the tiny crucifix from the ashtray of the seat back in front of me. It was Mexican travel insurance."  
Coming into the Country, p. 197

"I was a little relieved to see they were official, and not common criminals - naively relieved, as I would learn. Under gunpoint, we were ordered to leave our gear in the back of the truck and climb stairs up the back of the building."  
Coming into the Country, p. 211

"Visibility was good on that clear day, and I knew that somewhere across the arid expanse below ran the highway we had crossed the evening before. But for the life of me, I couldn't pick it out; United States or Mexico, it all looked the same to me."  
Coming into the Country, p. 225



## Topics for Discussion

How does Ted come up with the idea to actually make a crossing? Describe the crossing experience from Ted's perspective. It's noted that there's a difference between how Ted feels upon his arrival in the United States and how his friend, Alonso, feels. What is the reason for this difference? How do the two men react? What is the end result for Alonso?

Describe at least three instances of cultural differences described by Ted. How does Ted react to each of these? What is impact of these cultural differences on the individuals of the cultures? There's a general impression that the American way of doing things is superior to the Mexican way. Is this correct? Support your answer.

Ted makes another crossing with a group of men. Describe this second crossing. Who are in the group that cross this time? What is it that prompts these people to take the risks? What is the potential reward? What are the potential penalties?

What are "coyotes?" How does Ted come to be in contact with them initially? What kind of men are they? What are "domestic coyotes?" What is their role in the lives of the illegals living in America? Ted becomes something similar to a coyote on two separate occasions. Describe those.

Describe Ted's time in Mexico. What does he do with his time there? What does he discover about the Mexican culture that remains when the men are leaving for work in the United States?

Describe the trip "from Phoenix to Florida at 25 miles per hour." What is Ted's overriding emotion during much of the trip? How does he compare this emotion to the emotions of the Mexicans traveling with him? In what other instances are there differences in the ways Ted reacts to specific situations as opposed to the way the Mexicans react?

Ted sets out to figure out how illegal immigration impacts both Mexico and the United States. What does he discover? Describe at least three people he encounters during this research.