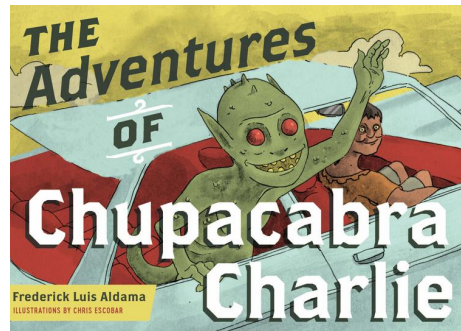




THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS



Resource Guide

How did you come up with the idea for the book?

Frederick Luis Aldama: In a way the idea for the book has been with me since I was a kid. Not just because I heard about rascally chupacabras from my *abuelita* (grandmother), but because that's when I first imagined a story with a kind, brave monster who flew a pickle-powered "Hickenboker"—a flying machine he'd use to go on adventures. A few years ago when I began hearing more and more about Mexican and Central American children being forcefully separated from guardians and siblings and put in immigration detention centers on the US/Mexico border, my brave little monster from childhood came to mind. Saving children locked in the ICE cages would be his first adventure.

What were you told about chupacabras growing up?

FLA: We lived in a modest house with a big backyard where we raised chickens and goats. What we didn't eat at home I would sell to teachers at school. Some nights I'd hear terrible screeches from where the *pollitos* (little chickens) lived. I asked my *abuelita*, Alicia, what that was. She said it was a chupacabra feasting. In the mornings I'd walk with hesitation to the chicken coop, knowing that I'd likely see a bunch of feathers and only a few chickens alive. It would be back to the *pulga*—the flea market—for us to buy more. Later, I realized that my *abuelita* also told me this so that I'd be too scared to go out at night.

How did folklore help you write a story about a very real, human crisis?

FLA: Latinx communities have long and deep traditions of vibrant, complex folktales. I'm thinking not only of the chupacabra (mostly heard in the Southwest and Puerto Rico) but also of La Llorona. There are many variations on the story of this woman who drowns her children, including recent Latina feminist recuperations. For those of us who grew up in the Central Valley of California, with its huge canal system, when there was a drowning it was because of La Llorona. The adults used La Llorona to scare us *niños* (kids) into not going near the canals.

The chupacabra is always depicted as a scary-looking bad guy. I wanted my central character to be friendly, curious, book smart—and a humanitarian and a vegetarian. Often Latinxs in the US are seen as different—even monstrous. What better way to turn this all upside down than to create an adventuring hero who loves himself, loves his pal Lupe, and who saves the day?



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS

How have you talked to your daughter about the border situation?

FLA: We have undocumented family members who have been arrested and deported, so the conversation was always front and center at dinner. When she was younger we read books (always together) like Duncan Tonatiuh's *Pancho's Rabbit*, which tells of the eponymous hero's difficult migration across Mexico into the US. Now that she's a teen I like to put a young adult novel on her bed every couple of days and ask her just to try the first chapter; she's usually hooked. Recent books include Alexandra Diaz's *Santiago's Road Home* and Ernesto Cisneros's *Efrén Divided*, Sylvia Zéleny's *The Everything I Have Lost*, and Reyna Grande's memoir *The Distance Between Us*. At dinner I gently ask her to talk to me about what she's read and viewed. Then we can ease into discussing issues like socioeconomic inequities, forced migration—nobody wants to leave a homeland—and what can be done.

What kids' books do you recommend, either for their representation of Latinx perspectives or for how they address current events affecting Latinx people?

FLA: Aside from what I mention above, my must-reads are anything by Monica Brown, Angela Dominguez, Yuyi Morales, Matt de la Peña, Benjamin Alire Sáenz, Francisco X. Alarcón, Juan Felipe Herrera, Duncan Tonatiuh, Zeke Peña, Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Pat Mora, Lucha Corpi, Jorge Argueta, Rhode Montijo, Pam Muñoz Ryan, Isabel Quintero, Ernesto Martinez, Meg Medina, Margarita Engle, Julia Alvarez, Xavier Garza, Paul Meyer, and Raúl the Third. I'm also very excited about Paola Mendoza and Abby Sher's new graphic novel, *Sanctuary*.

FOR FURTHER LEARNING:

Latinx literary resources:

- Latinx In Kid Lit: <https://latinosinkidlit.com>
- Cristina Herrera's review of *The Adventures of Chupacabra Charlie* discusses how folklore can help process current events: <https://www.latinxspaces.com/latinx-literature/will-the-real-monster-please-stand-up>
- Las Comadres para las Americas runs a national book club to support and advance the work of Latinx authors: <http://lascomadres.com/latinolit/>
- In *Latino/a Children's and Young Adult Writers on the Art of Storytelling* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), Aldama interviews 33 Latinx children's book creators. He discusses the project with Latinx Spaces here: <https://www.latinxspaces.com/latinx-literature/on-the-art-of-storytelling-for-latinx-children-and-youth>
- The #ownvoices and #weneeddiversebooks hashtags on social media call attention to the broader issue of diverse representation in publishing and to creators and stories across a spectrum of under-represented groups. The originator of #ownvoices discusses her hashtag here: <http://www.corinneduyvis.net/ownvoices/>
- Lee & Low Books' Diversity Baseline Survey quantifies diversity in publishing: <https://www.leeandlow.com/about-us/the-diversity-baseline-survey>



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS

More about family separations:

•The Women's Refugee Commission has a primer on the US/Mexico border situation and suggests several ways to help, ranging from monetary donations to providing moral support to detainees:
<https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/how-you-can-help-migrant-children/>

•*PBS News Hour's* video and study guide encourage Americans to consider migrant perspectives:
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/daily-videos/study-guide-how-separating-families-became-official-u-s-government-policy/>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

•How would you describe where Charlie and Lupe live? What about it is different from where you live, and what is familiar?

•Charlie's adventure starts when he makes a human friend, Lupe. Have you ever made friends with someone who had a different background or life experience from you? What did you learn about from that friend, and what did they learn about from you?

•What monsters or strange creatures have you heard about? What kind of adventure would you want to go on with those monsters if it turned out they were friendly like Charlie? Can you draw a friendly version of one of those monsters?

•What do you think the kids were feeling before and after Charlie and Lupe freed them?

•Lupe and Charlie live in Mexico, which is a neighbor of the United States. What do you know about Mexico? Do you know anyone from Mexico or other countries in Latin America? (Maybe you are Latinx yourself!)

•What have you heard about the border wall or about people who have come from other countries to live in the United States?

•If people in your family are from a country other than the United States, what would you like your friends to know about that country or its culture(s)? Do you have a favorite food, holiday, word, or other aspect of your family's heritage that you are particularly proud of?

•What do you think makes Charlie and Lupe feel at home where they live, and what makes you feel at home where you live?

•What would you like to say to kids who have been separated from their families at the border? How do you think you could help them?

•What do you think Charlie and Lupe's next adventure will be?