

## Lesson 2

### Return to Sender: A Literature-based Discussion About The Immigrant Experience

#### Grades 6 – 12 MODULE OVERVIEW

Lesson 1: The Immigrant Experience Through Different Media (90 minutes)	Lesson 2: The Immigrant Experience Literature-based Discussion <i>Return to Sender</i> (120-180 minutes)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Activity 1: Studying a Visual Text: The Immigrant Experience</li> <li>▪ Activity 2: Poetry and The Immigrant Experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discussion 1: Crossing Borders</li> <li>▪ Discussion 2: Fear of Loss</li> <li>▪ Discussion 3: Facing Challenges</li> <li>▪ Discussion 4: Being Resilient</li> <li>▪ Discussion 5: Together at Last</li> <li>▪ Discussion 6: Gathering Courage</li> <li>▪ Discussion 7: Adapting to Change</li> <li>▪ Discussion 8: Finding Home</li> </ul>

#### Preface

This story was selected because of its strong connection to the realities that some of our students might be experiencing or the stress and fear they might be suffering as a result of their own or their family migratory status. For high school students who might find this book too “easy”, it will be important to frame the use of the book as a vehicle to discuss and share, through the characters’ experiences, the commonalities and real challenges that families in this situation face.

#### Story Summary

A family is forced to hire migrant Mexican workers to help save their Vermont farm from foreclosure after the father is injured in a tractor accident. His son, Tyler, isn’t sure what to make of these workers. Are they undocumented? Mari, the oldest daughter of one of the migrant workers is proud of her Mexican heritage but feels increasingly connected to her American life. Her family lives in constant fear of being discovered by the authorities and sent back to the poverty they left behind in Mexico. As they learn about each other, Tyler and Mari find a way to be friends despite their differences.

#### I. Objective

Use the story as a springboard for students to share their thoughts and feelings about immigration, detention and deportation.

## II. Standards

ELA Reading Standards: Strands 1, 2, 3, 6

ELA Speaking and Listening: Strands 1 and 2

ELD Standards: I.A.1, I.B.5 & 6, I.C.11

History and Social Science Standards: 8.5.2, 8.8.6, 8.12.7, 10.10.1, 11.9.7, 11.11.1, 12.2.6, 12.6.3

## III. Materials

1. Student Response Journal

2. Literature Book - *Return to Sender* by Julia Alvarez, Yearling|Random House, New York, 2009

Teacher's Note: The lesson has been designed around reading excerpts from the book, mainly the letters and journal entries written by the main character. For this reason, each section includes a summary of the plot to create the context for the letter(s) and diary entries to be read.

3. Map of the U.S.

4. Student Handout 1 – Questions for Letter 1

5. Teacher Resource: Completed Tree Map Sample Graphic Organizer

6. Student Handout 2 (optional) – “La Golondrina”

7. Teacher Resource - Strips with one question and response from Julia Alvarez's interview in “A Readers Guide” found after Acknowledgments (page 325) in *Return to Sender*.

## IV. Vocabulary

adamantly

ransom

swallows

status

scawl(ing)

commotion

## V. Introduction

1. Response Journal

Write down/list what you think about when you hear the expression “*return to sender*”

2. Do a quick “whip around” by having the students share ideas. Skip any one who does not wish to share.

3. Tell students that they will be reading excerpts from a book titled *Return to Sender* by Julia Alvarez, to find out what *return to sender* means in the story.

## VI. Input

< Pages 3- 16 >

Summarize

*The main character in the story Return to Sender, Mari Cruz, is the oldest of three sisters. She has written to her mother with the news that they have*

*just arrived in Vermont with her father who has been hired to work on the farm of the Paquette family. The farm's owner had an almost fatal accident while working on his farm and is unable to work. Even though his middle school age son, Tyler, was doing all he could to help, Mr. Paquette has to resort to hiring workers to avoid being forced to sell the farm.*

< Section 1 (pp. 17 – 36)>

1. Show Vermont on the map.
2. Tell students that they will not read the whole book, but will learn about Mari and her family through reading Mari's letters and diary entries. Add that the story is written from two points of views – First person (Mari) and third person (the author)
3. Letter 1- 15 agosto, 2005: pages 17- 22
  - a. Tell students you will read Mari's first letter – 15 agosto, 2005 (pp. 17 – 22) aloud to find out information about Mari and her family. Ask students to pay attention to the date of each letter they will read as it will tell them how much time has passed.
  - b. In pairs, have students complete Student Handout 1- Letter 1: August 15, 2005 by answering the following questions:
    - Why are Mari and her family moving to Vermont?
    - Why didn't Mari want to move from *Carolina del Norte* (North Carolina)?
    - Show the state of North Carolina and the city of Durham on the map and its geographical relationship to Vermont
    - What is her father worried about?
    - What are Mari's struggles?
  - c. Debrief by asking what they learned.
4. Begin a class graphic organizer such as a Tree or Flow Map with key information gleaned from the letter. (See Teacher Resource – Sample Graphic Organizer). Instruct students to copy the graphic organizer in their Response Journal because they will be adding more information as they continue reading the story.
5. Letter 2 – 19 agosto, 2005: pages 23 – 36
  - a. Ask students to read the letter to discover: 1) more about Mari and 2) the reason Mari's mother is not with the family.
  - b. Have them write new information to their graphic organizer. Tell students they will be sharing this information with partners during the Reflective Discussion.

## VII. Reflective Discussion

### Tea Party

1. Have students stand up and walk around the room. At your signal, have them partner with the person closest to them and share the new information they added to their graphic organizer. Repeat once or twice.
2. Students can add information gathered from their partners to their graphic organizer.
3. Debrief and add information students share to the class graphic organizer based on the following questions:
  - a. What have you learned about Mari from this letter?
  - b. What is she struggling or having a difficult time with?
  - c. Why isn't her mother with them?
  - d. What do you think could have happened to Mari's mother?
4. Do you know anyone who has had a similar experience? How did they feel?
5. Response Journal  
After reading this letter, what do you think might be the connection to the title of the book?
6. Students share in small groups. Debrief by having volunteers from each group share with the whole class.

## VIII. Input

< Pages 39 – 96 >

### Summarize

*The family has been living on the farm for several months, and it is now the end of October. The Paquettes have grown attached to Mari and her family, including Tyler's recently widowed grandmother, who the girls now call Grandma. Tyler has become good friends with Mari.*

<Section 2 (pages 97 – 106)>

1. Ask students to read Mari's letter starting on pg. 97, "Papa started off by saying ..." and find out what has happened.

## IX. Reflective Discussion

### Triads

1. Students count off from 1-3 to form triads.
2. Ask students to discuss the questions displayed on the board or chart in their triads and add the information to their graphic organizer.
  - a. What else did you learn about Mari's mother? How does the family feel about it?
  - b. What does the "Trick or Treat" incident reveal?
3. Debrief and add information to the class graphic organizer.
4. Ask students to share how they felt when they read what happened during the incident.

**X. Input**

<Pages 109 – 226>

Summarize

*Mari's uncle Felipe was detained by Homeland Security, put in jail, and after several months sent back to Mexico.*

*It is now April and one night Mari's father asks to meet the Paquettes. He lets them know he has heard from coyotes who are asking for a \$3,000 ransom in order to release his wife. He must go to Texas to collect her but first he must find the money. Although the Paquettes want to help, they don't have that much money. Fortunately, the smugglers lowered the ransom to \$1,500 and with the help of relatives in California, Mari's father will be able to pay it. Mari's father thinks the smugglers agreed to lower the ransom the smugglers are nervous. There have been demonstrations throughout the country asking for immigration laws to be changed with people chanting "Si, se puede."*

*The smugglers allow Mari and her father to speak to her mom. Now, they say they could bring her to North Carolina for another \$500. Tyler loans Mari's father the \$500 he made working part-time for his grandmother's friend, Mr. Rosetti, but still there is the question of having the money for the trip.*

*As luck will have it, Tyler's aunt and uncle invite him to come to Boston and offer a birthday trip for him and a guest. Tyler asks for a trip to Durham, North Carolina in order to help Mari's family. Mari's father decides that Mari should be the one to go and collect her mother. He feels it would be very difficult for him to leave her uncle Armando to do all the farm work. Mari goes to Boston as Tyler's guest.*

< Section 3 (Pages 227 – top 238... left behind)>

1. Tell students that they will read Mari's letter in two chunks. Direct students to the pages they will be reading.
2. A – B Partners
  - Pairs designate one partner as A and one as B
  - Partner A reads a page and when finished, Partner B recounts what it was about.
  - Repeat process but this time Partner B reads.
  - Continue taking turns until all the assigned pages has been read.

**XI. Reflective Discussion**

1. What do you think about Mari and what she was asked to do? What is the basis for your opinion?
2. What happened when Mari went to collect her mother?
3. Add information to the graphic organizer

**XII. Input**

< Section 4 (pages 238 (starting at “*Why did your father move you?*”) – 246) >  
A-B Partners

Have students read the assigned pages using the collaborative structure previously described.

**XIII. Reflective Discussion**

1. What happened to Mari’s mother during the year she disappeared? Add to the graphic organizer.
2. What does the story show about the immigrant experience?
3. Response Journal:
  - a. Write about a difficult experience faced by someone you know. This person could be an undocumented immigrant who may have experienced a difficult crossing, or it could be someone who has had another type of difficult experience.
  - b. <Small Group Sharing>  
Have students share their entry in small groups. Ask them to choose the experience that most resonated with them and have the author or someone from the group share it if the writer would rather not identify him/herself.

**XIV. Input**

< Pages 249 – 266)>

Summarize

*The family is finally all together in Vermont. Mari’s father is having a very difficult time coping with what has happened to his wife while in captivity and does not seem like his normal self. Mari is upset about her father’s uncharacteristic angry outbursts over seemingly small things. Instead of letters, Mari is pouring her thoughts and feelings in a diary her mother has given her for her birthday.*

*It is now June and Tyler and Mari enjoy summer evenings, out in the field, looking at the stars through Tyler’s telescope while her sisters visit Tyler’s grandmother.*

< Section 5 (pages 267 – 279)>

1. Numbered Heads Together

- a. Ask students to count off from 1-4.
- b. Have them take turns reading aloud in 1-4 order until they finish the section.
- c. Tell students that during the Reflective Discussion you will call one of the numbers (1-4) randomly to answer questions. Thus, they should work as a team to engage all readers in the text.

**XV. Reflective Discussion**

In their *Numbered Heads Together* group (see above), tell students to discuss the questions below. Explain that when you call on a number, all students from each group with that number will stand up and share what their group discussed as the answer to the question you identify. Let them know that they can take notes, if they like, to help them share with the class.

- a. According to Mari, what happened to her parents? Why?
- b. Why didn't they take Mari or her sisters? What does everyone think will happen if they found them?
- c. What is Mari thinking and feeling?

**XVI. Input**

< Section 6 (pages 283 – 293 (top))>

Ask students to read Mari's diary entry for June 25, 2006 (pp. 283 – top of pg. 293).

**XVII. Reflective Discussion**

2. What did Mari decide to do? What does it tell us about her character?
3. What did you learn in this entry about the phrase "*Return to Sender*"?  
Ask students to return to their Response Journal entry from Section 1.  
How does it change your original prediction? Why do you think Julia Alvarez chose the title?
4. Discuss the following sentences:  
"But isn't that what they stamp on a letter, *Return to Sender*? Tyler asked. When there aren't enough stamps on it?  
"Precisely". Again, Mr Calhoun was nodding. "People are excess baggage." He looked disgusted.
5. Response Journal:  
Write your prediction as to what you think will happen to the family now.
6. Have volunteers share.

**XVIII. Input**

< Section 7 (pages 293 – 296) >

Read aloud to students the diary entry for June 30, 2006.

**XIX. Reflective Discussion**

1. How was the problem resolved?
2. What challenges/conflicts did the decision bring? Why?
3. Do you think Mari's family made the right decision?
4. Some immigrant families decide to let the American born children stay behind. What might be the reason for that?

**XX. Input**

< Pages 299 – 311>

Summarize

*It is now August and it has been one month since Mari and her family's arrival in their town of Las Margaritas in Southern Mexico. Tyler's grandmother and her friend, Mr Rosetti are getting ready to return to the US after visiting the Cruz's earlier than planned due to election unrest in Mexico. Mari has written a letter for Tyler letting him know that her father has every intention of paying him back the \$500 he owes him for the ransom payment, no matter how long it takes. Mari gives her father the news that the Paquettes had had to lease out their farm land.*

<Section 8 (pages 312 starting at " ... Papa, the Paquettes won't be farming anymore..." - 314)

- Ask students to read pages 312 to 314.

**XXI. Reflective Discussion**

1. What are the hopes and dreams of Mari and her family?
2. How do they feel about their lives in Mexico?
3. How does Mari's view of home differ from her sisters' or her parents?
4. Response Journal
  - What does home mean to you?*
    - a. Share your entry in small groups.
    - b. Debrief by asking students to share something they heard in their small group.

**XXII. Follow-up/Extension**

1. Grades 9-12:
  - a. Show the video "Undocumented Americans –Pedro's Story"  
(minutes 3:07 – 5:20)  
<http://www.apa.org/topics/immigration/undocumented-video.aspx>



- Begin a Venn Diagram or Double Bubble graphic organizer to compare and contrast Pedro's experiences with that of the characters in the book.
  - Share with students the rights and resources someone like Pedro may have.
- b. Show the video "Undocumented Americans –*Silvia's Story*" (minutes 6:18 – 8:28)
- Add to the Venn Diagram or Double Bubble a comparison of Silvia's experience and that of the characters in the book and Pedro's.
2. Grades 8-12
- <Jigsaw>
- Count off students from 1-7. Tell them that is their "Home Group"
  - Break students up into groups according to their number (1-7).
  - Distribute one interview question and response from "In Her Own Words – A Conversation With Julia Alvarez" (found in "A Reader's Guide", see **Contents** in *Return to Sender*) to each group. Let them know that, in an interview, Ms Alvarez was asked about the process she went through in order to write the book.
  - Ask each group to read the question and discuss Julia's response. Tell them to make sure they can recount Julia's response well enough so that they can explain it to their "home group" using THEIR OWN words.
  - Students return to their Home Group and share what they learned about the writing of *Return to Sender* in the words of the author.

Possible sentence frames:

The author was asked (if, what, how, why) \_\_\_\_\_.

Ms Alvarez/ The author (replied, responded) \_\_\_\_\_.

Ms Alvarez/ The author's (response was/answered that) \_\_\_\_\_

3. Grades 6-12
- Active Video Viewing  
Show video of Julia Alvarez being interviewed about what she learned about immigrants and farmers in Vermont when researching for the book *Return to Sender*  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLwtFTLH-jO&index=1&list=PLgsxBUgW\\_tXqDCOs9iOP6wHQOjxLiRYLK](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RLwtFTLH-jO&index=1&list=PLgsxBUgW_tXqDCOs9iOP6wHQOjxLiRYLK)

**An interview with Julia Alvarez – Migrant Justice (0:00 – 9:30 min.)**

- What does Julia say about family separation? What is the example she gives?
- Why are farmers in Vermont hiring undocumented workers? What do the two have in common?
- What surprised her and made her change her opinion about the farmers when she visited them while doing her research?
- What is the message she hopes readers take from her book?

5. <Choral Reading>

- a. Use the Handout “La Golondrina” with the lyrics to the song, (in English and Spanish) to conduct a choral read. If possible, provide the musical version and listen to the song in Spanish.

Below are links to the song in three different singing styles:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcFQOZtq1aQ> – Classical – Plácido Domingo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqUeAwMXAFA> - Mariachi – Los Caballeros

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vKss4xkuLaY> – Pop – Nana Mouskouri

- b. In their Response Journal,
  - Ask students to make a list of the ways the song had meaning to Mari and her family.
  - Write a response describing the feelings the music and words evoked in you.

6. Students might be interested in knowing that the song has become a hymn of sorts for people in exile, especially from Latin America because of its creative origins. Its composer, physician Narciso Serradel Sevilla (1843-1910), a native of Alvarado, Veracruz, Mexico, fought alongside General Ignacio Zaragoza during the war against the French invaders. Serradel was taken prisoner - and deported to France where --in a sudden and momentous rapture of bitter nostalgia and overwhelming melancholy for his beloved Mexico, composed the song that is now known all over the world. It has been sung by many singers, from Nat King Cole to none other than the famous soprano, Maria Callas.

### **Additional Resources**

1. [www.teachingbooks.net /tb.cgi?a=1&tid=16302#ActivityGuides](http://www.teachingbooks.net/tb.cgi?a=1&tid=16302#ActivityGuides)

Offer a short audio of an interview with Julia Alvarez, along with a brief reading by Ms Alvarez, from *Return to Sender* under the section “Book Readings”.

In addition, radio interviews given by Ms. Alvarez after the publication of the book can be found under the section “Author Interviews” on the webpage.

### **Letter 1 to Mamá: 15 agosto, 2005**

After reading Mari's letter (pp. 17-22), with your partner, respond to the questions below. If needed, refer to the text.

1. Why are Mari and her family moving to Vermont?

2. Why didn't Mari want to move from *Carolina del Norte* (North Carolina)?

3. What is her father worried about?

4. What are Mari's struggles?

## The Swallow

Where will you go,  
Swift and weary  
the swallow  
leaving here  
losing her way in the wind  
looking for shelter  
that she will never find.

By my bed  
I'll place your nest  
until the season passes.  
I too, O heaven!  
am lost in this place  
unable to fly.

Left, too  
my beloved homeland,  
that home  
that saw my birth.  
My life today  
is wandering and anguished.  
And I am unable  
To my home return.

Dearest bird  
beloved pilgrim,  
my heart  
nigh to yours;  
I will remember  
tender swallow,  
I will remember  
my homeland and will cry.

## La Golondrina

A donde irá  
veloz y fatigada  
la golondrina  
que de aquí se va  
por si en el viento  
se hallará extraviada  
buscando abrigo  
y no lo encontrará.

Junto a mi lecho  
le pondré su nido  
en donde pueda  
la estación pasar  
también yo estoy  
en la región perdido  
O Cielo Santo!  
y sin poder volar.

Dejé también  
mi patria idolatrada  
esa mansión  
que me vió nacer  
mi vida es hoy  
errante y angustiada  
y ya no puedo  
a mi mansión volver.

Ave querida  
amada peregrina  
mi corazón  
al tuyo acercaré  
voy recordando  
tierna golondrina  
recordaré  
mi patria y lloraré.

Narciso Serradel Sevilla

IN HER OWN WORDS-  
A CONVERSATION WITH JULIA ALVAREZ

**Q: Although this is a fictional account, you mention in your author's note that the situation it describes is very real. What brought this issue to your attention and inspired you to write a book about it?**

A: Since moving to Vermont in 1988, a lot of my Latino family and friends would say that I was moving to the "Latino-compromised" state of Vermont. They were right: in the 2001 census there were 5,504 people of Hispanic origin in *all* of Vermont. In fact, we were the state with the smallest Latino population.

But about eight years ago, this started to change. First, in terms of background, our Vermont dairy farms were in trouble. Many farmers were going out of business because the price of milk was at an all-time low. It was also difficult for them to find local help, since farm work is hard and doesn't pay as much as other jobs. So in order to survive, many farmers started hiring undocumented Mexican workers, many of whom brought their families along and also started having children here. Suddenly, just in our county alone, there was an unofficial count of five hundred Mexicans. Because they were undocumented, they were an "underground" population. Many didn't go out in public: they just stayed working on the farms. They were afraid that the authorities would spot them in lily-white Vermont and deport them.

Because I know Spanish, my farmer neighbors, the hospital, and the schools would call me up whenever they needed help with translation. I soon became acquainted with many of the Mexican families and their employers. In the schools, I met many Vermont farm kids who didn't understand what was going on. Why were their parents telling them to keep these workers a secret? What did it mean that their farms might be raided and people carted off, just like the Japanese Americans during World War II? The Vermont kids were upset and full of questions.

And so were the Mexican and Mexican American kids. What if they got home and their parents were gone? Why couldn't they have friends come over? Why did they have to keep their parents a secret?

That's when I realized that we needed a story to help us understand what was happening to us.

Often that is the inspiration for my books: something happens in my life, and I can't stop thinking about it. I call my type of inspiration "the pebble in my shoe" inspiration, that little pebble I can't seem to shake out of my mind! Life gives me a lot of them.

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**Q: To what extent are the characters in *Return to Sender* based on people you have met or known? Is there a real-life Mari or Tyler? Where did you take creative liberties and why?**

A: There are many real-life Tylers and Maris. Part of a writer's **research-even when she is writing nonfiction-is to immerse** herself in the material that inspires her. Since I was helping out in the schools, I got to hang out with "my material" the whole day. As soon as I got home, I'd furiously write up all my notes: little bits and pieces of conversation, the look on someone's face, the question a student had asked, what the lunch menu was for that day. Talk about homework! And maybe I ended up using one percent of all this material. Doesn't matter. A writer has to create a whole imaginary world inside her head in order to tell a story that occurred in that fictional world. When the time came for Mari to be walked into her classroom, I knew exactly what she was seeing, and those little details I had noted were right there for me to insert like little puzzle pieces in my story.

As for the characters themselves: they, too, are little bits and pieces of observed real people. There was a young farm boy, Michael, whom I shadowed as he did his chores. He taught me a lot about farming that I didn't know! Michael doesn't look like my Tyler, but his curiosity and freshness became part of my character. There was another little Mexican girl, Arelis, who was really spunky, and she actually inspired my Ofie. But part of Arelis's story-she "disappeared" one night with her family, who were afraid of a raid and fled back to Mexico-became part of my character's life as well. Another Mexican girl, Marfa, did have one American-born sister, Lorenza. She didn't understand why she was "illegal" and why her sister had every right to be in this country. That went into Mari's story.

See what I mean? A writer takes different bits and pieces from real life to create her characters and their world. But as you write, your characters start to assume their own shape and personality, and then they start telling you, the writer, which way their story should go. Each one wants to take over. So it's a balancing act: as the writer, you have to listen to them but you are also the one in charge, guiding the story to a satisfying conclusion.

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**Q: Do you think most people would react the way Tyler and his family did to the influx of immigrants into their community? What has experience shown you about our cultural ability or inability to accept strangers?**

A: What I learned from researching this story is that even within one family, there might be different opinions about immigrants in a community. Tyler, at first, is the one who doesn't like the idea about breaking the rules. His dad also agreed with that stance, until he had an accident and was about to lose his farm. So, finally, he went along with what his own brother was already doing, hiring undocumented workers.

I think it's natural to be unsure about strangers and to think *they* are different from *us*. But all the farm families I interviewed said that once they got to know these immigrants, they became friends. The Mexican families were moving in with the farm families, and both were sharing so much of their lives and discovering they weren't so different from each other. In fact, many of the Mexican workers had been farmers back in Chiapas, but they couldn't earn enough to keep farming. So here they were, in Vermont, helping out farmers who are in the same situation, only not as dire: on the brink of losing their family farms.

We are one human family, after all.

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**Q: Why did you choose to tell this story in alternating view- points and, occasionally, through letters?**

A: At first, I was just going to write a story from Mari's point of view. We had a lot in common. After all, I came to this country from the Dominican Republic when I was a ten-year-old, with Spanish as my first language. I know how difficult it was for me and my family, and I wish I had had books about immigrant girls back in 1960 that would have helped me understand what was happening to me. So I'm naturally drawn to an immigrant story.

But as I did the research and got to know a lot of farmers and farm kids, I thought, hmmm, this is the other side of Mari's story that completes the picture. What is it like for these farm families to be struggling to survive and have to break the law? I wanted both stories in my book.

But ultimately, this is a story about friendship, how we have more that unites us than divides us as a human family. How by understanding another point of view we bridge the differences between ourselves and another human being.

I also wanted each voice to sound different: Mari's and Tyler's, because they are two different characters. And I thought Mari might be afraid to openly tell her story. So writing letters seemed more natural for her. She could keep her story private and just tell it to one particular person. When Mari had to go into hiding with her sisters, I thought, now what? Then I realized she could write letters to her diary: Dear Diary!

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**Q: What led you to choose *Return to Sender* as the title?**

A: Readers ask me if I named the novel *Return to Sender* in reference to the post office stamp on letters with incorrect addresses. Well, actually, that situation does apply to the characters in my book. But the name comes from the dragnet operation carried out by the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement in 2006. They named their operation Return to Sender, and the idea was to raid work- places and seize undocumented workers and send them back to their home countries. Under Operation Return to Sender, some farms in Vermont were raided, the undocumented workers were taken away, and in some cases, the children were left behind with farm families who didn't know what to do. This was very frightening to the children and upsetting to everyone involved.

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**Q: Many of your books deal with social or political controversies but emphasize the human side—showing how people are affected on a personal and emotional level. What role, if any, do you think fiction plays in politics? Can a good story change minds? Can it change the world?**

A: Wow, these are huge, important questions and concerns. One thing I can tell you is that I try not to think about *huge* and *important* concerns or political issues while I am writing. I want to listen to the human side of the story, to my characters. Because when you come right down to it, all those controversies or political issues or laws or policies or opinions trickle down to a human being.

This is something the world of story teaches us: how an action or situation affects a specific life. At the heart of a story there is a character. At the heart of any political issue there is a person who is not very different from us. I don't think stories can change the world, but they can change a mind. And that is how we can change the world, one reader at a time!

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**Q: What do you hope readers will take away from this book?**

A: What I most want is for readers to fall in love with my book! A book is like your child. You put her out there and you want her to find friends who will give her a home in their hearts and imaginations.

I want my readers to enter into the story and come out a slightly different person than they were before reading it. I don't think books change us in huge, drastic ways, but they do change us invisibly and importantly. When you read a book and get lost in it, you become someone else. You understand the world from another person's point of view. After all, for several hundred pages you've been that character! And that means your one-self has been expanded to include someone else. That's awesome! If we could only do that with every person we meet, imagine their lives and feelings, have compassion for their struggles!

I also hope that through understanding my characters, my readers understand themselves a little better. You explore another character's world, and then you start noticing more surprises and interesting things in your own life and self. Books don't just help us discover other people, they help us discover ourselves as well.

