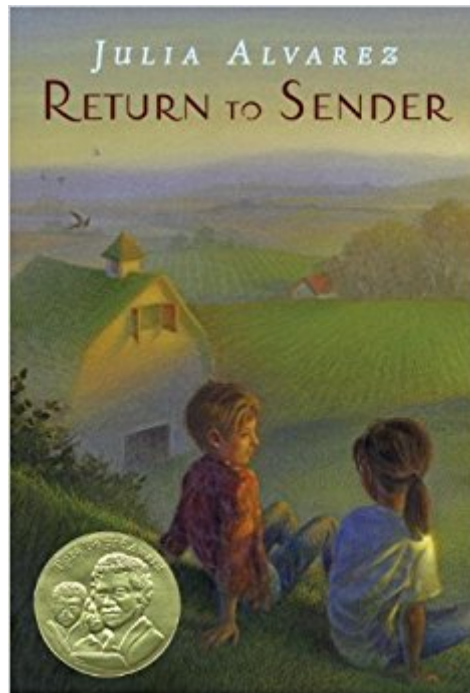




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# Return To Sender



## Synopsis

An award-winning, moving, and timely story about the families of undocumented workers by renowned author Julia Alvarez. After Tyler's father is injured in a tractor accident, his family is forced to hire migrant Mexican workers to help save their Vermont farm from foreclosure. Tyler isn't sure what to make of these workers. Are they undocumented? And what about the three daughters, particularly Mari, the oldest, who is proud of her Mexican heritage but also 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. Can Tyler and Mari find a way to be friends despite their differences? In a novel full of hope, but with no easy answers, Julia Alvarez weaves a beautiful and timely story that will stay with readers long after they finish it. Winner of the Pura Belpré Award Winner of the Américas Award An NCSS-CBC Notable Children's Trade Book in the Field of Social Studies A "A must-read." Kirkus Reviews A "Communicates in compassionate and expressive prose the more difficult points of perhaps the most pressing social issue of our day." San Antonio Express-News A "This timely novel, torn right from the newspaper headlines, conveys a positive message of cooperation and understanding." School Library Journal A "The plot is purposive, with messages about the historical connections between migrant workers today and the Indians' displacement, the Underground Railroad, and earlier immigrants seeking refuge. . . . The questions raised about the meaning of patriotism will spark debate." Booklist A "A tender, well-constructed book." Publishers Weekly

## Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Grade 4-7 •Sixth-grader Tyler Paquette lives in a dairy-farming community in Vermont. His father was injured in a tractor accident and must now turn to undocumented Mexican laborers to run the farm. Thus, a trailer on the property soon becomes home to the Cruz family •sixth-grader Mari, her two younger sisters, father, and two uncles, all needing work to survive and living with fear of la migra. They have had no word on Mari's mother, missing now for several months. Tyler and Mari share an interest in stargazing, and their extended families grow close over the course of one year with holiday celebrations and shared gatherings. Third-person chapters about Tyler alternate with Mari's lengthy, unmailed letters to her mother and diary entries. Touches of folksy humor surface in the mismatched romance of Tyler's widowed Grandma and cranky Mr. Rossetti. When "coyotes" contact Mr. Cruz and set terms for his wife's freedom, Tyler secretly loans the man his savings, then renegotiates a promised birthday trip in order to accompany Mari to North Carolina to help rescue her abused mother. When immigration agents finally raid the farm and imprison both Cruz parents, it signals an end to the "el norte" partnership, but not the human connections. This timely novel, torn right from the newspaper headlines, conveys a positive message of cooperation and understanding. •Susan W. Hunter, Riverside Middle School, Springfield, VT Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

With quiet drama, Alvarez tells a contemporary immigration story through the alternating viewpoints of two young people in Vermont. After 11-year-old Tyler's father is injured in a tractor accident, the family is in danger of losing their dairy farm. Desperate for help, Tyler's family employs Mari's family, who are illegal migrant Mexican workers. Mari writes heartrending letters and diary entries, especially about Mamá, who has disappeared during a trip to Mexico to visit Mari's dying abuelita. Is Mamá in the hands of the border-crossing "coyotes"? Have they hurt her? Will Homeland Security (la migra) raid the farm? The plot is purposive, with messages about the historical connections between

migrant workers today and the Indians' displacement, the Underground Railroad, and earlier immigrants seeking refuge. But the young people's voices make for a fast read; the characters, including the adults, are drawn with real complexity; and the questions raised about the meaning of patriotism will spark debate. Grades 6-9. --Hazel Rochman --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

The topic of immigration is a complicated one, and I love how it is told from different points of view focused on the people surrounding this issue, both the farming family wanting to make ends meet and the family from Mexico trying to create a better life for themselves. If books do not portray differences, students cannot learn to transcend them. I appreciate to see what it'd be like on both sides of illegal immigration. It was difficult to read some of Mari's entries. As the oldest, she carries the most fear about her mother's absence. In addition, her undocumented status was a huge burden for her, more than any eleven-year-old should ever have to bear. The characters and their problems are very real, and *Return to Sender* is a sympathetic treatment of the human side of illegal immigration.

This story has us traveling from Mexico to Vermont and eventually back to Mexico. We find ourselves meeting Mari and Tyler two young teens that meet each other at the family farm. Mari's family are undocumented worker she lives with her father,uncles, and two younger sisters. Mari's mother is currently missing while she was returning to the family with the coyote, a smuggler. It's been months since the family has heard from her. Mari deals with her loss of her mother by writing letter to her although she is not allowed to mail them for fear the immigration might locate them. Tyler and Mari become friends and quickly confiding in each other. This book teaches acceptance,tolerance, and dealing with bullies. Great as a read out loud book.

*Return to Sender* places a human face on the immigrants who make their way to the United States and to the families who benefit from their labor. Children are children, families are families no matter from what country. This is an important lesson that I wish to teach my grandchildren, since we are an international family. Too often the hardships that immigrant families endure are marginalize and even discarded because we, as Americans, do not pay attention to the human factors.

This was a pretty good book. I read it with my son. I would have given it 5 stars but I didn't like how the author told a lot of the story through letters. In other words, a young girl is writing to her mother

and you learn about what has been happening through her letters. There are several chapters of that type of writing style in the book.

I loved the topic but for me the story dragged. I think it would be difficult reading for some children with so many characters to keep track of and going back and forth between Maria's letters and Tyler's thoughts.

Julia Alvarez knows how to characterize the blur in the line between right and wrong. She knows how to make it clear that reality and morality are continuums and not dichotomies of this or that, up or down, or yes or no. There are no absolutes. (Now, there's an oxymoron.) We have a long way to go. Alvarez begins with a young man, her protagonist, Tyler, the younger eleven-year-old son in a family who has survived and thrived by running a dairy farm in Vermont. The family's farming heritage is at risk. Tyler's older brother is away at college, mostly unavailable to help out on the farm without jeopardizing his education and eventual career, and Tyler's father has been injured and disabled, perhaps permanently, in a farming accident. Tyler's father can't do the work he normally did. It is unclear when and if he ever will be able to do the work again. Extended family also can't adequately help out. So paying the bills and keeping the farm is at risk. The family needs help or to change their dynamics: selling the farm, moving from their land, doing something entirely different than farming. Tyler's parents eventually hire undocumented immigrants --- a couple of men --- to assist with the dairy work. One of the immigrant men is married and has three daughters. The oldest, Mari, slowly becomes Tyler's friend and ally, an unfolding as miraculous as springtime. Mari's mother has disappeared in the murky criminal element that arose to fulfill the void created by ambiguities in United States immigrant policies, underfunded policies that for years tacitly approved of undocumented immigrants coming to the United States to work in jobs that citizens in better times didn't want to do. The analysis of various notions is tenderly at play in Alvarez's book: What is a family? What does it mean to be honest? What good is it to have a law without compassion, or without implementing it and adequately funding its substantial enforcement? What does it mean to be a good neighbor and a friend? What sacrifices are appropriate and necessary of good neighbors and friends? And does all of that that apply only to individuals and not to communities and to nations? What is charity? Is it a weakness or strength? What about religion and the mystical, and gazing into the heavens? Hope?"... life is about change, change, and more change. 'When you're born as a child, you die as a baby. Just like when you're born as a teenager, you die as a child.'... 'But there are good sides even to bad or sad things happening,' my mom reminds me...." This is a

coming of age adventure where a boy and a girl have more love and compassion than the men and the women do, where a couple of families have greater diplomacy toward each other than the greatest nations on earth do for each other. So it would be good to take their advice and look into the heavens and contemplate the beauty of the night before flying apart. Not just one star but five.

A fantastic read for sixth graders to get a better understanding of the struggles that illegal immigrants and the children of these immigrants have to go through. I felt that this was an authentic and genuine book of the cultural struggles. The characters in this novel are very relatable to all races and genders; which allows everyone to get involved with the story on an even high level. Students will greatly benefit from reading this text by Julia Alvarez.

A very thought producing novel

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