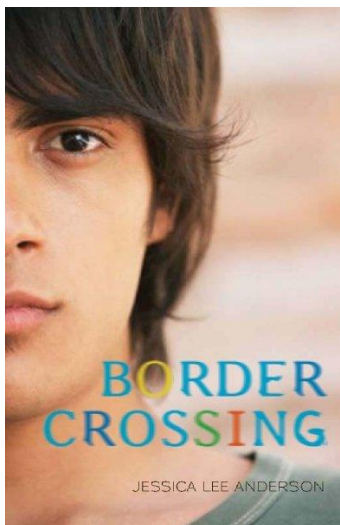


# BORDER CROSSING

by

Jessica Lee Anderson



Manz is sure of one thing—he lives on the wrong side of the tracks in dusty Rockhill, Texas. Life is tough for everyone—his hard-drinking mother, her truck-driving boyfriend, even his privileged friend Jed—but especially for Manz, the mixed-race son of migrant apple pickers. If he could only get out of town, his life would be better.

When the summer heat sets in, Manz and Jed take a job rebuilding fence for a cattle ranch outside town. There he meets Vanessa, who works in the ranch's kitchen. The two hit it off, but Manz isn't sure he can trust her. As the dog days drag on, Manz must negotiate an unwieldy terrain involving an unpredictable, alcoholic mother, a best friend whose father uses him as a punching bag, and a simmering, creeping delusion that "Operation Wetback"—which brutally relocated illegal aliens in Mexican territory following World War II—has been put back into effect. Manz's bright and questioning mind begins to give in to its own claustrophobic temptations as he finds guidance in the voices that have been growing louder and more insistent each day.

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## Discussion Questions

1. In the first chapter of the novel, Manz says, "I was ready for my life of running to begin so I could finally get out of my head." What do you think he means by this? What might this foreshadow?
2. What is the significance of colors for Manz? Shapes? Noises? What about the significance of painting for Delores? Or jokes for Tom?
3. How does Manz relate to his mother, Delores? How might their relationship be improved?
4. What do you think is the cause of Manz's mental decline?
5. How do the border issues play into his mental state? Discuss Operation Wetback.
6. What is your take on the voices Manz hears? Why are the voices different? How would you react if you started hearing voices?
7. Throughout the story, do you feel Jed's actions are justified? Why or why not?
8. What sort of impact does Dr. Jabowski have on Manz? What about the others in the group sessions? How would you respond to a similar situation?
9. What do you think will happen between Manz and Sally? Manz and Vanessa? What about the other characters in the book?
10. Knowing this episode in Manz's life, where do you think he will be in a year from now? Five years?

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## Educators Guide

1. Manz is overwhelmed when he learns about Operation Wetback. Research other similar events in U.S. history. Write about your reaction to these government relocation programs.
2. What are present day issues in border towns?
3. How do you feel about fencing in the U.S. border?
4. Manz struggles with his identity. Write about your own personal struggles. How do they shape who you are?
5. Research the causes and symptoms of schizophrenia.
6. Choose a side character and describe Manz through his or her point of view.
7. Vanessa carved *Los Postes de Muertos*, “dead posts” to honor her relatives. Draw your own post to honor someone significant to you.
8. Mexican wedding cookies are featured in the book. Try making your own cookies: <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/paula-deen/mexican-wedding-cookies-recipe2/index.html>

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## FAQs

Q: What inspired you to write *Border Crossing*?

A: I was shocked when I learned about Operation Wetback while studying history **in college**. How had I not learned about this before? Besides anger, the knowledge of this event made me feel insecure even though I'm Anglo—I thought about it for three years before Manz's voice and story began to develop.

Q. You said it: you're Anglo. What qualifies you to write a story about a character who struggles with racial identity?

A. I'll also add that I'm neither male nor schizophrenic. A much too easy answer would be to say, "We're all people." But I also think it is too easy to say, "You shouldn't even attempt to understand." I spent much time researching and interviewing individuals though I recognized that the novel may seem less authentic for some readers regarding my background. Knowing this, I still felt compelled to tell Manz's story.

Q. Will there be a sequel to *Border Crossing*?

A. There isn't a sequel planned, though I've thought about writing a book from Jed's point of view.

Q. Is *Border Crossing* your first novel?

A. Actually, *Trudy* was my first novel. Trudy's parents are old. Really old. Besides dealing with this, Trudy also struggles with math and changing friendships. When her father begins to repeat himself, forget things (including her), and is generally confused, Trudy knows her life will be forever changed. She must find the strength to accept things and be there for her family.

Q. What advice do you have for beginning writers?

A. Reading, researching, and revising is key. Above all, reading is the best training a writer can get. Reading will help you discover your own voice, and will inspire your own stories.

Q. Schizophrenia is central to the story—where can I learn more about this disorder of the mind and brain?

A. Schizophrenia.com provides excellent information and support.

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## About the author: Jessica Lee Anderson

Jessica Lee Anderson's passion is writing literature for children. In 2004, Jessica graduated from Hollins University with a Master of Arts in Children's Literature. *Trudy*, IRA Children's Book Award Notables and winner of the Milkweed Prize for Children's Literature, was her first novel and was released fall 2005 by Milkweed Editions. She later released *Border Crossing* (fall 2009) after writing two non-fiction readers—*What is a Living Thing?* and *Presidential Pets*. Jessica's short story, "Miracle on Stone Street," appears in *Mistletoe Madness* by Blooming Tree Press. She has written fiction and non-fiction for *Highlights for Children*, *Highlights High Five*, *Stories for Children Magazine*, *Wee Ones Magazine*, and *Holiday Crafts 4 Kids*. She is currently an instructor at the Institute of Children's Literature.



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