

 YouTube Originals



PAPER CHILDREN  
NIÑOS DE PAPEL

a film by ALEXANDRA CODINA

**DISCUSSION GUIDE**

# FILMMAKER STATEMENT

by Alexandra Codina

As a documentary filmmaker, I'm always careful to consider how my framing of a story will affect a movement or an issue. Never has this been more true than in making "Paper Children."

In 2014, I read a report by Americans for Immigrant Justice on the unfolding crisis of unaccompanied children fleeing violence in Central America to seek protection in the United States. That year, over 60,000 children sought refuge, an enormous increase after levels had remained under 8,000 for many years. The context was horrifying—gruesome gang violence, extreme poverty, human trafficking, and sexual violence, all disproportionately affecting children. Notably, this included far more girls and increasingly younger children than ever before.

As the mother of little boys, I was heartbroken reading their stories; and as the daughter of a former child refugee, I was appalled at our country's reaction. Rather than questioning why children would flee their homes alone, risking a treacherous journey, our government sounded the alarm of a border security crisis and rushed to deport them back to the danger from which they fled (for some deportation is a death sentence).

While working on "Paper Children," I was struck by the unequal treatment of the eldest brother, Fernando. Armed groups took over their village, threatened to murder and rape his younger siblings and decimated their extended family. Fernando had no choice but to bring his siblings to safety in the United States. As an unaccompanied child, Fernando's asylum claim was fast-tracked through immigration courts. Being a typi-

cal 17-year-old, he was reluctant to show his emotions, buried his trauma, and was quickly denied by the Asylum Office. His younger siblings were unable to keep their emotions hidden, yielding different outcomes. Even under the best of circumstances with competent, pro bono legal representation (the children are represented by Catholic Legal Services), asylum feels like a game of roulette.

In the middle of a pandemic, as we fight for our health and livelihoods, it feels particularly callous to turn our backs on the most vulnerable.

My father was welcomed in the United States from Cuba as a 14-year-old unaccompanied child in the 1960s. He fled mandatory military conscription through Operation Peter Pan, which brought 14,000 children to safety in the United States. Unlike the children and families arriving today, my father was granted immediate legal protection in recognition of the oppressive regime that he fled, rather than being labeled a criminal or security threat. I want Fernando, and other children like him, to have those same opportunities.

I grew up hearing the stories of my family, but it wasn't until I became a mother myself that I really understood my grandmother's bravery. If I were in Karen's or my grandmother's shoes, I too would have done everything in my power to keep my children safe.





## THE FILM IN CONTEXT

### INTRODUCING THE CENTRAL AMERICAN MIGRATION CRISIS

Asylum seekers from Central America face incredible threats in the journey towards possible refuge in the United States—including risks of kidnapping, murder, sexual violence, starvation, dehydration, beatings, incarceration, and deportation. Unaccompanied children are the brave children who refuse to join gangs or other criminal groups back home, and make the treacherous journey towards survival alone and arrive at our border without their parents.

Though the numbers had been rising steadily since 2011, the United States saw an astronomical surge in the amount of children fleeing violence in Central America in 2014. The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) reported between 7,000-8,000 cases of children who arrived at the border in 2005. In 2014, 68,541

unaccompanied children arrived at the U.S./Mexico border. The increased number of children continues with 69,488 unaccompanied children placed in shelters in 2019.

**In 2014, 68,541  
unaccompanied  
children arrived  
at the U.S./Mexico  
border.**

**68.541**

## WHY CHILDREN WERE FLEEING THEIR HOMES

Three vital elements made this era of migration unique:

1. The sheer number of children arriving—2014's increase was 77% greater than the previous year.
2. While previous unaccompanied youth seeking asylum had typically been teenage boys, in 2014 many more girls and younger children were also fleeing.
3. Most importantly, were the dire conditions that propelled the mass migration. While many children previously arrived in the United States to reunite with parents who had sought alleviation of poverty, conditions in Central America had drastically changed. In 2013, Central America's Northern Triangle of Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador were three of the five most dangerous countries in the world. Rather than being pulled to the United States for an opportunity, young people were being pushed out of their homelands by extreme violence.

Narco cartels were the primary cause of the terrorizing violence. When the United States pushed billions of dollars to stop the flow of cocaine from Colombia up the Caribbean, the drug trade was routed inland to the Northern Triangle. There, children were enlisted—mostly by Mexican traffickers fighting for control over drug turfs—as the cartel's foot soldiers. Gangs threatened children in order to recruit them to use and distribute drugs, to serve as lookouts and, eventually, to become the cartel's hitmen. Children faced enormous threats of physical and psychological violence, the murder of loved ones, sexual assault, rape, and not uncommonly, their own death.

By way of example, at the time, Nicaragua had equal levels of poverty to Honduras, but the Nicaraguan government had an iron fist, which prevented the gangs and cartels from taking over. As a result, the levels of violence were strikingly different. While almost non-existent in Nicaragua, in 2014 Honduras was considered the murder capital of the world. Children fled, not in search of a better life, but to survive.

*Children fled,  
not in search  
of a better life,  
but to survive.*

## THE MISCHARACTERIZATION OF ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Opponents have often incorrectly claimed that two factors incentivized Central American children to migrate to the United States: 1) the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)—which grants a 2-year respite from deportation and work permits to eligible undocumented youth who arrived in the United States with their parents and meet a strict set of guidelines—2) and a supposed lack of border enforcement. Additionally, by characterizing fleeing children as criminals, politicians stoked anti-immigrant feelings in order to forward their own platforms. By turning a humanitarian issue into a political one, policymakers have been free to gut the system unchecked. What began years ago as a slow chipping away at 40 years of carefully crafted asylum law, has turned into an avalanche these past few years, making it nearly impossible to seek refuge in the U.S. today.

This crisis sits within a broader context that points to the United States' long term failure to protect humanity's most vulnerable population, which transcends political parties. Recognizing the lack of protection for children in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, most nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, "the first significant steps toward creating a world in which any child—even the most vulnerable separated immigrant child—can be



aided to reach his or her full potential.” Though the United States contributed heavily to the drafting of the CRC, it is the only United Nations member that has failed to ratify it.



### THE CRISIS IN CONTEXT OF PAPER CHILDREN'S RELEASE IN 2020

At the time of *PAPER CHILDREN*'s release during the summer of the Coronavirus pandemic, hundreds of migrant children and teens have been quietly deported by American authorities without the opportunity for due process—no day in court, or even speaking to a social worker. Without notifying their families or verifying whether children have a safe place to return to, children have been turned around hours after arriving across the border or woken from their detention center beds to be flown to their home country. The Trump administration justifies these actions through a 1944

law that allows the President the power to stop foreigners from entering the U.S. under “serious threat” of a dangerous disease—but many of the youth being sent home entered the country before the pandemic. According to ICE records, between March and mid-July 2020 more than 40,000 people had been deported.

Consequently, the United States government knowingly exported the virus in large numbers to outside countries, contributing to the global health crisis. Inside detention centers, where social distancing or other basic safety/health precautions are not being implemented, the pandemic poses a massive risk to both those detained, and the spread of COVID-19 to outside communities by detention center officers and staff. More than 1,406 immigration detainees in the United States had tested positive for coronavirus as of June 1, 2020, though the number is thought to be much higher due to the reported testing of fewer than 12 percent of detainees.

### AN URGENT HUMANITARIAN CONCERN

In an effort to shed light on the “invisible refugee crisis” by following Fernando and his family’s journey from Honduras to Miami, *PAPER CHILDREN*'s storytelling shifts the narrative from a statistics-driven political dialogue to an urgent humanitarian concern. While the majority of the film takes place between 2016 and 2019, the crisis is ongoing. *PAPER CHILDREN* invites us to engage the full spectrum of the migration experience through a heart-centered, family-oriented approach that honors the survival struggle and resilience of unaccompanied minors and their families.



## How To Use This Guide

This discussion guide aims to support critical dialogues about concepts presented in the documentary *PAPER CHILDREN*, opening with a contextualization of the ongoing crisis of children fleeing Central America, which began in 2014. A series of customizable activities, adjustable to fit various group settings, are designed to lead viewers in personal, creative, research and advocacy exercises and explorations. The guide includes reference sections that lay out key moments in the history of United States refugee protections and myth-bust common mythologies about immigration, followed by a robust series of discussion questions, post-screening group activities and information about relevant advocacy campaigns and organizations. Additional resources can be found on the film's website: [PAPERCHILDRENDOTCOM](http://PAPERCHILDRENDOTCOM)

## A Note For Facilitators:

Paper Children surfaces traumatic events that include people in the film describing extreme violence, sexual violence, and pervasive discrimination. The film does not contain graphic images or overt descriptions of violent encounters, however facilitators should consider ways to create a safer space for viewing and “unpacking” the film. Providing a trigger warning for participants allows them the option of preparing for viewing, or to opt-out as needed. Before the discussion, facilitators can lead the group in creating a shared set of community agreements. These might include commitments to confidentiality, respecting differing opinions, believing each person’s lived experience as truth, and holding space for growth.

REFERENCE SECTION

## The Gonzalez Family



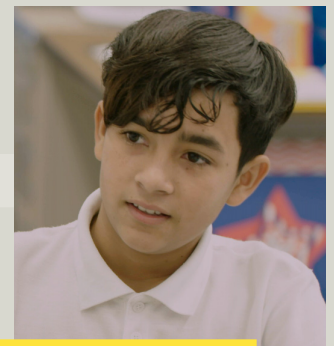
**FERNANDO** was 12 years old when his mother left Honduras for the U.S., and he became head of his household. At 17, he guided his siblings on the treacherous journey north to the U.S.



**CHINA** is the only girl in the family, who was 11 when her mother left.



**MAURICIO** is the middle brother. He was 9 years old when their mother left.



**JAN** is the youngest sibling, who was 5 years old when their mother left; and only 9 when they made the journey North.



**KAREN** is the children's mother. She left Honduras 5 years before her children, to work and earn money in the U.S.



**CELIO** is the children's father. Jan was a few months old when Celio left Honduras to work in the U.S.



# Key Moments in the History of Refugee Protection in the United States

Historical Context: Early in the country's history, asylum seekers, fleeing violence and persecution, were treated as any other immigrant who arrived in search of better economic opportunity. Conversely, immigrants faced no strict legal barriers. Federal immigration restrictions only arrived with the Page Act of 1875 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned Chinese workers, as well as convicted criminals, from crossing the borders. What follows is a timeline of key moments in the History of Refugee Protection in the United States.

## 1920s

Lawmakers passed strict quotas that restricted Catholic and Jewish immigrants from Eastern and Southern European countries, who were characterized as ill, weak, and less capable of contributing to the economy and assimilating to the U.S. culture.

## 1939

More than ten years later, the quotas prohibited hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi prosecution from entering the United States. For example, over 900 Jewish refugees aboard the St. Louis, a German ocean liner, were turned away by the Roosevelt administration and sent back to Nazi Germany. Later, approximately a quarter of the ship's passengers would die in the Holocaust (including children and families).

## 1948

In response to World War II displacing at least 7 million people in Europe, the U.S. ratified its first refugee protections through the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which, over the course of four years, resettled over 400,000 European refugees.

## 1951

The United Nations formally defined a refugee as anyone who cannot return to their home country "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion." This was more or less limited to protecting European Refugees in the aftermath of WWII.

## 1960

14,000 unaccompanied children are brought to the United States from Cuba during Operation Peter Pan. This program helped school-aged children to escape repression in Cuba under Fidel Castro's regime. The United States, at the height of the Cold War, also sought to protect children from Communist ideologies.

## 1967

The U.S. signed on to the U.N.'s 1967 refugee protocol, which expanded its scope to universally apply to all people fleeing persecution, without temporal and geographic restrictions.



## 1980

In the aftermath of thousands of Vietnamese and Cambodians fleeing danger in their home countries, the Refugee Act of 1980 allowed 50,000 refugees to enter the United States each year, raised from its previous ceiling of 17,400. The Act also funded a new Office of U.S. Coordinator for Refugee Affairs and an Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) and built on already existing public-private partnerships that helped refugees settle and adjust to life in their new country.

## 1990

The Sanctuary Movement formed to offer protection for refugees fleeing Central American wars, which led to Congress creating the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) visa program in 1990 for people affected by armed conflicts or national disasters.

## 2002–03

Following 9/11, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was created, and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was split into three new agencies: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).

## 2008

Congress passed the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPPRA), which protects victims of human trafficking and includes provisions for unaccompanied migrant children (UAC) who are often vulnerable to trafficking en route to or while in the United States.

## 2014

More than 60,000 unaccompanied children arrived at the U.S. border, having traveled alone and without parents or guardians, fleeing extreme violence of drug cartels in Central America, signaling a massive humanitarian crisis. That same year, the Obama administration initiated the “rocket dockets”, which fast-tracked children’s cases through immigration courts, often not allowing time to find a lawyer.

## 2018

U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions implemented changes to immigration law, severely limiting eligibility for asylum by overturning a precedent that allows women fleeing domestic violence, and children fleeing gang violence, to qualify for asylum. He wrote “generally, claims by aliens pertaining to domestic violence or gang violence perpetrated by non-governmental actors will not qualify for asylum.”

# 1920–2020

## 2019

The Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP), also known as the "Remain in Mexico" program, were introduced on January 25, 2019 by the United States Department of Homeland Security. Under the policy, U.S. border officers refuse entry to non-Mexican asylum seekers, who must remain in Mexico while their cases are pending (in increasingly dangerous border towns). As of November 2019, over 56,000 asylum seekers, including 16,000 children, have been forced to remain in Mexico. Also in 2019, the U.S. government prevented anyone who traveled through another country before arriving at the southern border of the U.S. from filing for asylum.

## 2020

With the onset of COVID-19, the U.S. government cites Title 42, to effectively close the border for health reasons, leaving many people in perpetual and dangerous limbo. On June 15, 2020, the Department of Homeland Security and the Executive Office for Immigration Review proposed regulations which would effectively gut asylum protections for the most vulnerable, undoing 40 years of asylum law.

*We could do better if we choose to.*

For a more comprehensive historical timeline from 1891-2003, visit:  
[USCIS.GOV/REFUGEE-TIMELINE](https://uscis.gov/refugee-timeline)







# Busting Common Mythologies About Immigration

**DACA AND UNACCOMPANIED MINORS ARE THE SAME GROUP OF PEOPLE.**

**MYTH**

**FACT**

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a form of legal relief for young adults who were brought to the U.S. before reaching their 16th birthday. They must have resided in the U.S. since June 15, 2007, along with other specific guidelines. DACA provides a temporary status, but no path to citizenship. They are often referred to as Dreamers. Unaccompanied minors are children who arrive at the U.S. border alone, without their parents or legal guardians. The recent wave of unaccompanied children began in 2014, after the DACA cut off date of 2012.

**UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN THE UNITED STATES ARE HERE ILLEGALLY.**

**MYTH**

**FACT**

Unaccompanied children are not breaking the law. When arriving at the border, these children typically turn themselves in to border patrol agents, asking for help. Seeking protection initiates a legal process to determine if they will receive refugee status. The act of seeking asylum is a legal path to citizenship.

**MOST UNACCOMPANIED YOUTHS ARE GANG-INVOLVED OR BRINGING DRUGS TO THE U.S.**

**MYTH**

**FACT**

The mythology of young asylum seekers as criminals or gang members is rooted in anti-immigrant sentiment and not reflective of the true motivations for fleeing: to escape the violent recruiting of minors for involvement with drug cartels.

**UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN HAVE A RIGHT TO A LAWYER IN IMMIGRATION COURT TO HELP PLEAD THEIR CASE FOR ASYLUM STATUS.**

**MYTH**

**FACT**

Immigrants (including children) do not have the right to a lawyer in immigration court, and have to find and pay for their own. There is no public defender model in the immigration system. As a result, the majority of young children, lacking language skills, or any fluency in English, navigate the complex immigration system alone. A private lawyer is incredibly expensive, and without a lawyer the vast majority of kids' cases are denied. The siblings in the film are the rare exception, who found pro-bono reliable lawyers.

**PEOPLE ARE COMING TO THE U.S. BECAUSE THEY WANT TO STEAL OUR JOBS AND MAKE MONEY.**

**MYTH**

**FACT**

Increasingly, people are being pushed out of their homes by extreme violence, vs. the traditional economic opportunity 'pull factor' which traditionally drives migration. This "push" factor is especially true of children, families, and women.

**WE PAY MONEY FROM OUR TAXES TO SEND MIGRANTS BACK TO THEIR HOME COUNTRY.**

**MYTH**

**FACT**

When migrants are released from detention, they are released to a sponsor or family member. They may not leave detention until their transportation is paid for by themselves or their sponsor.

**UNDOCUMENTED PEOPLE DON'T PAY TAXES, WHICH DRAINS OUR RESOURCES.**

**MYTH**

**FACT**

In fact, billions of tax dollars are paid each year by undocumented immigrants paying taxes to state, local and the federal governments. In 2010, the Social Security Administration estimated that payments from unauthorized workers accounted for about \$12 billion in tax revenue for Social Security. The chief actuary of the Social Security Administration Stephen Gross said in 2013, "we estimate that earnings by unauthorized immigrants result in a net positive effect on Social Security financial status generally."



**WHEN CHILDREN ARE SENT BACK TO THEIR HOME COUNTRY, THEY ARE RECEIVED SAFELY BY FAMILY MEMBERS.**

**MYTH**

**FACT**

Gangs often target those who have been deported. While there is no official tally, making the numbers likely much higher than what's been reported, by way of example, in a 2020 report, Human Rights Watch found 138 cases of Salvadorans killed after deportation from the United States since 2013.

**REFUGEES ARE A BURDEN TO RECEIVING COMMUNITIES**

**MYTH**

**FACT**

The goal of refugee resettlement is to protect refugees while helping them to become self-sufficient and contributory members of their new community. By opening businesses and paying taxes, contrary to popular mythology, refugees can help economically invigorate local economics.

**PEOPLE GIVE BIRTH TO "ANCHOR BABIES" JUST TO STAY IN THE UNITED STATES.**

**MYTH**

**FACT**

While it's true that children born in the United States have been granted citizenship through the 14th amendment, babies born to undocumented parents cannot shield their family from deportation. A U.S. citizen must be 21 years old before they can sponsor their parents for a green card, and must be able to prove that they can financially support their parents. Furthermore, parents who were not admitted in the United States through legal channels have to go abroad as part of the legalization process, and often aren't allowed back into the United States for 10 years. Even with a green card, parents will enter a five-year holding period before applying to citizenship. This mythology also dangerously paints a human right to start a family as a calculated scheme for citizenship.

**THE UNITED STATES REFUGEE PROCESS ISN'T SECURE, WHICH HELPS TERRORISTS TO EASILY ENTER THE COUNTRY.**

**MYTH**

**FACT**

No other category of traveler is subject to more rigorous processes than refugees. The screening process takes a year, minimum, and is a calculated investigative process that involves numerous federal intelligence agencies.



## Discussion Questions

### ASYLUM SEEKERS AS HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Immigration issues are often framed as a political issue—*relating to the government or the public affairs of a country*, rather than a humanitarian one—*concerned with or seeking to promote human welfare*. How does *PAPER CHILDREN*'s approach to filmmaking offer us humanitarian insight into our immigration crisis? What were the most affecting moments of the film for you—and why?

Even within immigrant communities, there can be a divide between those who have immigrated “legally,” who feel that undocumented people—often fleeing danger—have jeopardized or invalidated their struggle for U.S. citizenship. After watching the film, what factors do you think might propel these divisive narratives?

*PAPER CHILDREN* offers frightening statistics during the film. What can statistics accomplish in the conversation on the invisible refugee crisis? Where are statistics limited, and what other approaches are needed to support the public in understanding the issue at hand?

*PAPER CHILDREN* was released during the shutdown due to COVID-19. For the first time, many families gained a small insight into what it means to be separated and to fear for the safety of loved ones. Thinking about Fernando and his family's extreme story of separation and fear, consider: what have you had to give up to ensure your family's safety? How does it feel to have your own life operating in limbo, or on hold while awaiting the future? Through the pandemic, can you better imagine the experience of families like Fernando's?

Which person featured in *PAPER CHILDREN* did you relate to the most, and why? Why is it important that we connect to stories like Fernando and his family's shown on film?

### GOVERNMENT, MEDIA AND THE NARRATIVE OF FEAR

In one scene, Jan (the youngest sibling) listens to a news report on television, holding his head in hands, “it's too much.” How does the media portray asylum seekers from Central America? How does the current administration? What are some words and phrases that you've heard used in the media to describe those crossing the border?



For years, media and the government have started targeted campaigns to label people fleeing Central America as dangerous “criminals,” “rapists,” and “gang members”—particularly in relation to older teenage boys. How does this portrayal influence the public’s ideas of minors crossing the border? And how is Fernando, in particular, an immediate challenge to this characterization?

Arriving at the border is only the beginning of an immigrant’s story in America—but the media focuses almost solely on the point of entry. Why do you think the media strategically chooses this approach?

The filmmaker offers the viewer many quiet moments of family time, in addition to soccer games, learning, and scenes from work life. In what ways does this filmic portraiture counter the stories we expect from media around, particularly, undocumented immigrants?

Intersectionality is defined as the *interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage*. Looking through an intersectional lens, where else do we see narratives of dangerous young people of color in our media? What parallels can be made between immigration and other oppressive systems in the United States?

*“It’s tough remembering the past. Usually, you want to forget. It’s better to forget. It’s horrible how people look after being murdered.”*

**FERNANDO**



### HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS A COMMUNITY

Early on in the film, we see a mother crying while she tells her story of her husband being killed. Her 5-year-old child steps up to the task, explaining in detail how his father was murdered, without visibly showing emotion. What might this tell us about the experience of how children process the trauma of the past?

In the film, lawyers discuss recent ICE raids. The “individual officers have a lot of discretion”, the lawyer says, and points to how people get swept up when on the path of an officer looking for a “person of interest.” What other scenes in the film reveal a sense of persistent trauma while awaiting asylum in the U.S.?

Fernando says, “It’s tough remembering the past. Usually, you want to forget. It’s better to forget. It’s horrible how people look after being murdered.” Both repeated personal testimony and psychological evaluations are leveraged in the appeal for asylum—which requires reliving traumatic moments repeatedly in practice interviews, as well as the courtroom and an individual asylum interview. What is the impact of the asylum-seeking process on those who have already experienced trauma?

What are some reasons you can imagine that undocumented people and asylum seekers who have experienced significant trauma may not feel safe, com-

fortable, or supported in speaking with an American therapist? How do lawyers, as we see in the film, fill in for the role of a therapist?

Consider the intimate, and sometimes painful, conversations *PAPER CHILDREN* offers us access to between Fernando, China, and their mother. In what ways did each character hold their own specific trauma—and how was this trauma different for the young men in the family versus the women, and in particular, China's experience?



### BUILDING RESILIENCE, BUILDING A NEW LIFE

Fernando and his family rely on their faith to survive violent encounters, years of separation, a treacherous journey, and waiting in limbo in the U.S. The mother, Karen, is especially devout and draws on her faith when she has no control over the outcome of her children's cases. How does religion play a central role in helping them develop a sense of resilience in the face of their fears and lived traumas? What are ways you, or people you know, build a sense of resiliency and healing in your own lives?

In your opinion, what are the elements of a satisfying life (safety, family and friends, meaningful work, education, passions, hobbies, etc.)? Where and how in

the film do we see Fernando and his family engaging in the elements of a satisfying life? In what ways are the family members still struggling to create a fully inhabited new life in the United States?

The school experience is present in a few of *PAPER CHILDREN*'s scenes. What are the barriers we see to Fernando and his brothers' schooling experience in the United States? What educational alternatives do we see presented to the young people who have migrated?

Throughout the film, we see and hear about many ways that the family takes care of one another, sometimes in surprising ways, like withholding information or temporarily separating. How have the members of Fernando's family kept one another safe, both physically and emotionally?







# Activities



## Post-Screening Activity:

### Personal Journeys:

### *Mapping the Impact of Trauma*

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Materials:** Chart paper or digital alternative, paper, writing utensils

**Activity Overview:** While the media focuses on the border crossing as the singular transformative moment in asylum-seekers personal journeys, Fernando's journey of crossing the border was a relatively short time period in his life. In reality, Fernando's trauma is rooted in a much deeper act: becoming head of the household at age 12 when his mother left him in charge of his siblings. Thrust into adulthood as a youth, Fernando adapted by assuming a position of stoicism, hiding the gangs' explicit threats and absorbing the burden of fear alone, in order to protect his loved ones.

Once in the United States, Fernando lives under a constant state of anxiety, not knowing if he'll be allowed to stay or be sent back to the violence that originally separated him from his family. The act of migration creates a lifelong impact, both in Fernando's own emotional life, his family relationships, and in his connection to society. This reflective exercise invites participants to consider the implications of traumatic events on our lives, who is allowed access to healing, and how we build resiliency.

**Step One:** On a piece of chart paper (or a digital alternative), assign one participant to visually record as the group collectively maps the steps of Fernando's journey from Honduras to the United States. You might try it from memory at first, and then return to the list below to include any overlooked information:

- The first 17 years of life Fernando lives in Honduras
- When Fernando is 12 years old, his mother leaves Honduras for the U.S.
- Fernando leaves Honduras in 2014, and guide his siblings north

- Fernando is locked for 9 days without sunlight with Jan, China and Mauricio in a detention camp in the U.S.
- Fernando and his siblings spend a month in a children's shelter
- Fernando reunites with parents in Miami, FL, in 2014
- Fernando's asylum denied a year later (2015)
- Fernando returns to immigration court for the 4th time in 2019
- His final court date is set for 2021

**Step Two:** Individually, invite each participant to identify a personal challenge from their past, and map their own personal journey in a notebook, or separate piece of paper. Let participants know they will not be sharing this mapping with the larger group, in order to offer a sense of safety in their reflecting.

**Step Three:** Discuss as a group how the concept of time can become complicated through traumatic impact.

- Though the timeline of direct impact may be brief, in what ways does a difficult event color or follow our lives for much longer than the actual event itself? What consequences of a difficult event cannot be "mapped" —that are more abstract, or pervasive, and don't necessarily translate as points on a timeline?
- In Fernando's case, consider how the media latches onto the point of entry as the story of who migrating children are in their totality. How does his identity become swallowed in the public eye by this relatively short time period in his existence? In what ways do we see this play out in the film? What is the impact on the rest of his journey into adulthood? What other traumas are playing out for Fernando, that cannot be as easily captured on a timeline?
- Reflect on your timeline. What factors (identity, class, citizenship, family support) have enabled you to move beyond the difficulty with more or less ease? What factors supported Fernando's healing? Thinking of scales of the interpersonal, as well as the societal, what supports were absent that might have supported him further?



## Post-Screening Activity:

### *These Children Are Not Bad Hombres:* Creating Counter Headlines

**Time:** 30–45 minutes

**Materials:** Paper or digital alternative, paper, writing utensil

**Activity Overview:** This creative exercise invites participants to pull inspiration from Fernando and his siblings to create counter-narratives that combat negative media stereotyping of Central American migrant children.

**Step One:** Read *These Children Are Not Bad Hombres* by Sonia Nazario, published in 2017 in The New York Times. Picking up the slanderous phrase spoken by Trump, this article implores the reader, much like *PAPER CHILDREN* does, to consider a child's innocence when deciding the protections they deserve. If you do not have time to read the article with participants, the group leader can summarize its main points.

**Step Two:** Draw two columns on a shared document (paper or digital alternative), and in the left column invite participants to share the negative media representations of immigrants from Central America they've witnessed on television or in the newspaper.

On the right column, fill the page with words and phrases that describe Fernando, China, Mauricio, and Jan from *PAPER CHILDREN*. Briefly discuss the disparity between these two lists. Where do we see counter-narratives to damaging media portrayals, and who is responsible for creating them?

**Step Three:** Taking self-agency, invite participants to create their own series of counter-headlines, jumping off from Nazario's article title:

These children are not bad hombres, they are \_\_\_\_\_

Some may choose to shorten the headline to simply:

These children are \_\_\_\_\_

Utilizing words from the right-hand column of the group generated list—and beyond—invite participants to reshape the headline to tell a narrative that uplifts the full humanity of children fleeing violence across the border. Share the generated headlines out as a group.

**Take it a step further** by inviting participants to create memes or social media campaigns from the headlines, posting on the Internet with links to relevant articles that participants have researched and fact-checked.





## ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS & ORGANIZATIONS

**American Civil Liberties Union:** The ACLU dares to create a more perfect union — beyond one person, party, or side. Our mission is to realize this promise of the United States Constitution for all and expand the reach of its guarantees. The fundamental constitutional protections of due process and equal protection embodied in our Constitution and Bill of Rights apply to every person, regardless of immigration status.

**Americans for Immigrant Justice** (AI Justice) is a non-profit law firm that fights for justice for immigrants through a combination of direct representation, impact litigation, advocacy, and outreach.

**American Academy of Pediatrics** is an organization of 67,000 pediatricians committed to the optimal physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all infants, children, adolescents, and young adults regardless of their immigration status..

**American Psychological Association:** The leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States as well as understanding and addressing the needs of unaccompanied immigrant minors.

**Catholic Charities Legal Services, Archdiocese of Miami** (CCLS) provides essential services to immigrants in South Florida. CCLS provides direct services to children, families and individuals, often pro-bono or at a low cost. Their Children's Team represents the 4 siblings in our film.

**Families Belong Together** works to permanently end family separation and detention, seek accountability for the harm that's been done, and immediately reunite all families who remain torn apart.

**Interfaith Immigration Coalition** is a partnership of faith-based organizations committed to enacting fair and humane immigration reform that reflects our mandate to welcome the stranger and treat all human beings with dignity and respect. Coalition members work together to advocate for just and equitable immigration policies, educate faith communities and serve immigrant populations around the country.

**Kids In Need of Defense** (KIND) believes no child should face immigration court alone and provides attorneys to represent children at no cost. KIND has intentionally developed a comprehensive approach to address the multi-faceted needs of unaccompanied migrant children once they are in the U.S.

**Mijente** is a political home for Latinx and Chicanx people who seek racial, economic, gender, and climate justice.

**RAICES Action Fund** is an independent, not-for-profit organization representing the advocacy and political arm of our movement. Fortifying the commitment to defend human rights and advocate for immigrant justice, RAICES Action is your chance to join us in educational and electoral activities like public education campaigns, grassroots organizing, and legislative advocacy.

**The UN Refugee Agency** (UNHCR) is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights, and building a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities, and stateless people.

**US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants** advances the rights and lives of those who have been forcibly or voluntarily uprooted. It is their mission to protect the rights and address the needs of persons in forced or voluntary migration worldwide and support their transition to a dignified life.

**Save the Children Action Network:** As the political advocacy arm of Save the Children, we are building bipartisan support to make sure every child has a strong start in life. We're doing this by advocating for high-quality early learning for children in the U.S., the safety of children arriving at the southern U.S. border, and the protection of vulnerable children worldwide.

**Todo Por Mi Familia:** Seneca Family of Agencies, a non-profit mental health agency, is leading Todo Por Mi Familia, a nationwide effort to connect impacted families with mental health assessments and treatment. Over the last two years, Seneca supported the class action lawsuit as a pro bono expert witness and consultant. Seneca is coordinating referrals to local mental health providers for interested families who were impacted by the Government's policy.

## Sources

<https://theweek.com/articles/837512/complicated-history-asylum-america--explained>

<https://immigrationforum.org/article/trafficking-victims-protection-reauthorization-act-safeguards-children/>

<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/about-us/background/4ec262df9/1951-convention-relating-status-refugees-its-1967-protocol.html>

<https://www.crf-usa.org/bill-of-rights-in-action/bria-10-2-b-haiti-and-the-boat-people>

<https://www.history.com/news/cold-war-refugee-operation-peter-pan-cuba-eisenhower>

<https://www.archivesfoundation.org/documents/refugee-act-1980>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/11/us/politics/sessions-domestic-violence-asylum.html>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/04/us-suspend-deportations-during-pandemic>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/10/us/ice-coronavirus-deportation.html>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/01/29/qa-trump-administrations-remain-mexico-program>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/us/politics/trump-asylum-ruling-immigration.html>

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Unaccompanied\\_Migrant\\_Children\\_Myths\\_Facts.pdf](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Unaccompanied_Migrant_Children_Myths_Facts.pdf)

<https://justiceforimmigrants.org/what-we-are-working-on/refugees/dispelling-myths/>  
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/16/anchor-babies-the-ludicrous-immigration-myth-that-treats-people-as-pawns>

<https://www.as-coa.org/articles/explainer-what-daca>

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/02/05/deported-danger/united-states-deportation-policies-expose-salvadorans-death-and>

<https://americasvoice.org/blog/immigration-101-immigrant-taxes/>

[http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Unaccompanied\\_Migrant\\_Children\\_Myths\\_Facts.pdf](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Unaccompanied_Migrant_Children_Myths_Facts.pdf)

<https://justiceforimmigrants.org/what-we-are-working-on/refugees/dispelling-myths/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/mar/16/anchor-babies-the-ludicrous-immigration-myth-that-treats-people-as-pawns>

<https://www.as-coa.org/articles/explainer-what-daca>

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/02/05/deported-danger/united-states-deportation-policies-expose-salvadorans-death-and>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/01/us/politics/trump-asylum-ruling-immigration.html>