

All the Way to Mexico

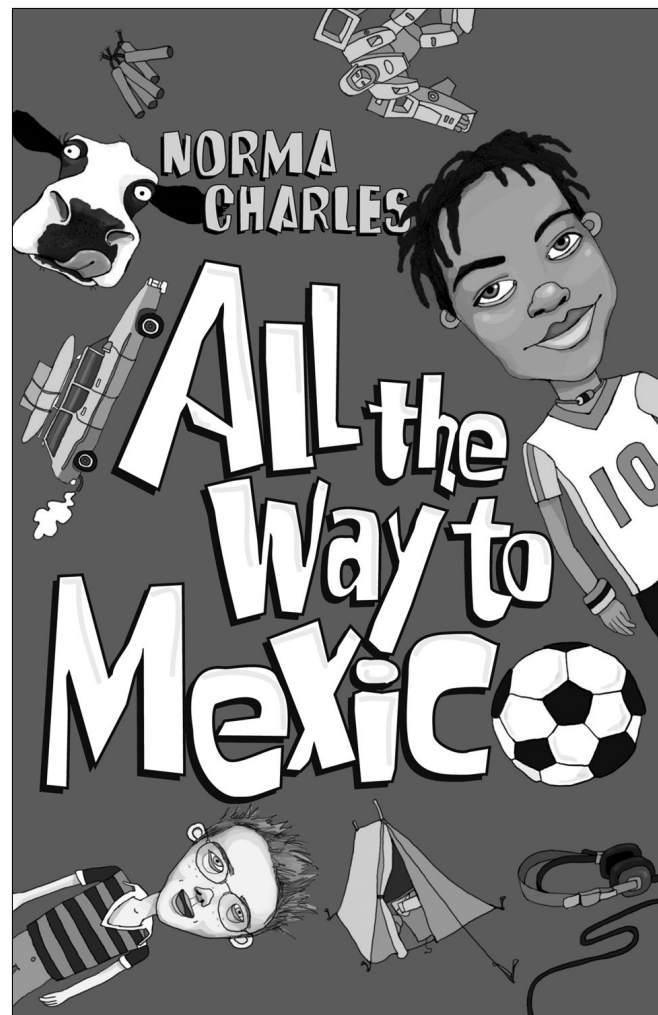
by Norma Charles

AGES 8 AND UP • GRADE LEVEL 4 TO 8

ABOUT THE BOOK

Jacob Armstrong is twelve years old and he's on his way to Mexico for a honeymoon. This is no ordinary honeymoon, however; it is his mother's and they are travelling with her new husband, Fred Finkle, Fred's kids, Barney and Sam, and Jacob's rebellious sister, Minerva. They're on their way to Mexico—on a honeymoon for six.

So begins Norma Charles' funny and wise new novel for kids—especially boys—aged eight to twelve. The newly blended family is crammed into an old station wagon heading south for a month's trip from Vancouver to Mexico. The four children have different ways of handling their new situation—Jacob cradles his soccer ball in his lap and dreams about being a star soccer player ... but when they reach Mexico and there is no soccer game in sight he wonders how he will cope. Eventually, the new family manages to not only survive the trip but also to develop bonds that pull them closer—and Jacob's honeymoon is worthwhile after all.



1-55192-598-2 • \$10.95 CDN • 160 PP

YOUNG ADULT FICTION



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This is **Norma Charles'** 13th book for children, including the recent Raincoast release *The Accomplice* (2001), which was shortlisted for a British Columbia Book Prize and was also a Canadian Children's Book Centre "Our Choice" selection. Norma is a member of CWILL, PEN, the Federation of B.C. Writers, CANSCAIP and the Writer's Union. She has toured widely in schools and libraries and worked as a teacher-librarian with the Vancouver School Board for ten years. She now lives in Vancouver and writes full time.



BEFORE THE BOOK • Words You Need to Know

mounds	negotiated	entranced	evaporated	frugal	expounding
solemnly	scrimmage	scalawags	feinting	comedian	temperamental
distracting	hypnotizing	wrath	Rastafarian	rummaged	veto

• Activities

1. Use an atlas to locate Jamaica. What do you think the climate would be like there? Use an encyclopedia or other resource to check your answer and to find out more about this country. Write a short paragraph describing traditional food and clothing in Jamaica.
2. What ideas do you have about a career that might interest you? Describe ways you might begin to prepare for this career.
3. Many children experience their parents separating and then marrying someone else. When both new partners already have children, the families become “blended” when they move in together. If you have experienced this, think of one or two things you would be willing to share. If you have not experienced this, try to imagine what it might be like. Think of one or two positive things about the experience, and two things you might find challenging. Take turns sharing your thoughts with a partner and then listening carefully.

EXPLORING THE BOOK • Chapter Questions and Activities

CHAPTER ONE

1. Begin a map of the trip by sketching the route the family has driven from Vancouver to Van Duzer Park. Use a big enough piece of paper to go all the way to Mexico. You may want to refer to an atlas or road map for help.
2. Explain the phrase “practise makes perfect.”
3. Why is Jacob “totally fed up”?

CHAPTER TWO

1. Sam’s Seraptor action figure is never clearly described. What do you think it looks like? Draw a picture or write a description.
2. Why don’t the Finkles want second helpings of the soup?
3. Write a diary entry for either Jacob or Minerva describing his or her feelings about this day.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Why was Jacob’s soccer ball so precious?
2. Add this part of the trip to your map.
3. Draw a comic strip to show how Jacob lost his soccer ball and what the boys found.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Why is Jacob reluctant to take a dune buggy ride?
2. Draw or describe in a paragraph the picture Fred would have taken with his camera at the end of the chapter. Be sure to include the sand dunes.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Use a Venn diagram to compare the food preferences of the two sides of the family. Draw two overlapping circles. In one, write the foods that Fred and the boys like; in the other, write the foods preferred by Jacob and his mother and sister. In the space where the circles overlap write the foods everyone enjoys. Add to this diagram as the story progresses.
2. What rules did the boys break by setting off the firecrackers?

CHAPTER SIX

1. Add this section of the trip to your map.
2. Draw a picture of Big Blue stuck on Lombard Street.
3. How do you think Fred feels about reggae music?



CHAPTER SEVEN

1. What kind of person is Fred Finkle? Write a brief description.
2. How are Jacob and Minerva going to learn to be financially responsible?
3. What things happen to make both Minerva and Jacob miserable?

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. Research the origin of reggae music and write two or three sentences about it.
2. What things did Jacob do to try to keep Minerva safe?
3. How did Rosa show she was angry with Minerva?

CHAPTER NINE

1. Add to your Venn diagram of food preferences from chapter five.
2. What happens to Jacob's soccer ball?
3. Write a diary entry that Sam might have written for this evening.

CHAPTER TEN

1. Why does Jacob follow Sam?
2. How does Sam try to make up to Jacob for throwing his ball away?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. Complete your map of the trip as far as Tijuana.
2. With three other people create a reader's theatre presentation of the incident in the sporting goods department. Each read the words spoken by one of the characters and have the narrator fill in everything else.

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. Add Encinada to your map.
2. How does Jacob protect his sister from the boys on the street?
3. Why does Barney want the sunglasses?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. Add to your map and food diagram.
2. Why do you think Jacob is feeling peaceful?
3. What signs are there that the two sets of children are starting to get along better? Give a few examples.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. What sacrifice does Jacob make to buy a birthday present for Barney?
2. Draw a picture of Barney's birthday present.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. How do Jacob and Barney try to earn money for a new soccer ball? Why doesn't it work?
2. How does Jacob get the money in the end?
3. At the end of this chapter Jacob reflects on his relationship with Barney. Create a sociogram for Jacob. Write his name in the middle of a page then draw an arrow to the names of each of the other major characters in the story. Along the shaft of the arrow write a word to describe the relationship. Now draw another arrow from each of the characters back to Jacob and add a different word for the relationship:

ie: Jacob $\xleftarrow{\text{son}}$ $\xrightarrow{\text{mother}}$ Rosa



BEYOND THE BOOK • Activities

1. Make a list of the items you would take on a trip similar to the one in this story.
2. Explain at least one activity or travel game to help pass the time on a long road trip.
3. Refer to your Venn diagram about food and create a balanced meal that everyone in the story would enjoy.
4. Make a collection of jokes about an animal other than cows.
5. Create a series of three postcards that any one of the characters might have sent to a friend back home. Decorate the front to represent some part of the journey, write an appropriate message on the back and address it to yourself.

• Curriculum Extensions

SCIENCE *Ecosystems* • Make a poster to show how the Oregon sand dunes are created.

Make a chart of the plants and animals that live in a sand dune ecosystem.

What is a dune buggy and how is its design adapted for the terrain?

Fireworks • Research the history of fireworks. Find out how they used to be made and how they are made now. Design a display for an upcoming celebration.

SOCIAL STUDIES *Geography of Western North America* • Write a report about one of the following states: Washington, Oregon, California.

Write a report about one of the following cities: Vancouver, Seattle, San Francisco.

Mexico • Prepare a report or booklet about Mexico. Include information on traditional culture such as food, dress and recreational activities.

Jamaica • Expand on your earlier paragraph to prepare a report or booklet about Jamaica. Include information on traditional culture such as food, dress and recreational activities.

PHYS. ED. *Soccer* • Draw a diagram of a soccer field showing the dimensions.

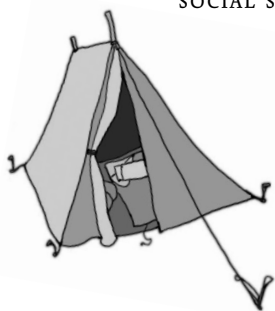
What does the acronym FIFA stand for. Explain what FIFA is and what its role is for the sport of soccer.

Research the history of the World Cup. Include a list of where the tournament has been held since 1986 and who won the Cup each of those years.

MUSIC *Reggae* • Prepare an oral report on the subject of reggae music. Look at the development of the music, specific influences on style and sound, and celebrated artists or representative works. Play examples for the class to enhance your presentation.

LANGUAGE ARTS *Biography* • Write a biography of the great soccer superstar Pelé or Mexican soccer hero Hugo Sanchez.

Write a biography of celebrated reggae artist Bob Marley.



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www.raincoast.com

All *The Way To Mexico* Teacher's Guide (1-55192-625-3) and other learning resources for Raincoast titles are also available at www.raincoast.com. Many of these activities are inspired by the Reading 44 document published by the North Vancouver School District. Raincoast Books grants teachers permission to photocopy this guide for classroom use.

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