



***Separate Is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh**

Abrams Books for Young Readers, Abrams Books, 2014

ISBN: 9781419710544 (Hardcover)

*Age Range: 6-9 (Suggested by Publisher)

Grade Range: 1st-4th (Recommended by *School Library Journal*)

BOOK SYNOPSIS

When her family moved to the town of Westminster, California, young Sylvia Mendez was excited about enrolling in her neighborhood school. But she and her brothers were turned away and told they had to attend the Mexican school instead. Sylvia could not understand why—she was an American citizen who spoke perfect English. Why were the children of Mexican families forced to attend a separate school?

Unable to get a satisfactory answer from the school board, the Mendez family decided to take matters into its own hands and organized a lawsuit. In the end, the Mendez family's efforts helped bring an end to segregated schooling in California in 1947, seven years before the landmark Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* ended segregation in schools across America.

Author and illustrator Duncan Tonatiuh writes in his notes, "My hope is that this book will help children and young people learn about this important yet little known event in American history. I also hope that they will see themselves reflected in Sylvia's story and realize that their voices are valuable."

Using his signature illustration style and incorporating his interviews with Sylvia Mendez, as well as information from court files and news accounts, Tonatiuh tells the inspiring story of the Mendez family's fight for justice and equality, a fight that is as relevant today as it was 75 years ago.

REVIEWS AND PRAISE

★ "Tonatiuh masterfully combines text and folk-inspired art to add an important piece to the mosaic of U.S. civil rights history." - [Kirkus Reviews](#), **starred review**

★ "Younger children will be outraged by the injustice of the Mendez family story but pleased by its successful resolution. Older children will understand the importance of the 1947 ruling that desegregated California schools, paving the way for *Brown v. Board of Education* seven years later." - [School Library Journal](#), **starred review**

"Tonatiuh (*Pancho Rabbit and the Coyote*) offers an illuminating account of a family's hard-fought legal battle to desegregate California schools in the years before *Brown v. Board of Education*." - [Publishers Weekly](#)

"Pura Belpré Award-winning Tonatiuh makes excellent use of picture-book storytelling to bring attention to the 1947 California ruling against public-school segregation." - [Booklist](#)

"The straightforward narrative is well matched with the illustrations in Tonatiuh's signature style, their two-dimensional perspective reminiscent of the Mixtec codex but collaged with paper, wood, cloth, brick, and (Photoshopped) hair to provide textural variation. This story deserves to be more widely known, and now, thanks to this book, it will be." - *The Horn Book Magazine*

Updated 1/10/24

Abrams Books

kluby@abramsbooks.com

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- Pura Belpré Illustrator Honor Book
- Robert F. Sibert Honor Book
- ALSC Notable Children's Book
- Américas Award Winner
- Jane Addams Children's Book Award Winner
- Bank Street's Children's Book Committee's Best Children's Books of the Year
- Best Multicultural Children's Books (Center for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature)
- Bluestem Award Master List
- California Young Reader Medal Finalist, Picture Books for Older Readers
- Capitol Choices
- Eureka! Nonfiction Children's Book Awards, Gold
- ILA Teachers' Choices
- NCSS Carter G. Woodson Award Winner, Elementary
- NCSS Notable Social Studies Trade Books For Young People
- NCTE Orbis Pictus Honor Book
- New York Public Library's Children's Books: 100 Books for Reading and Sharing
- Texas Bluebonnet Award Master List
- Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award Winner, Works for Younger Children

MEDIA AND RESOURCES

- [Discussion Guide](#)

*A NOTE ON AGE RANGES

A publisher-suggested age range covers the gamut of readers that publishers envision using the book, whether for independent reading, family sharing, group study, or in other ways. Educators have the best sense of the appropriate age range for the diverse learners they work with and understand these ranges vary depending on a book's intended use.