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English 112B

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Matt De La Peña

An Annotated Bibliography

Who is Matt De La Peña

Matt de la Peña is the author of four critically acclaimed young adult novels: *Ball Don't Lie*, *Mexican WhiteBoy*, *We Were Here* and *I Will Save You*. He's also the author of the award-winning picture book *A Nation's Hope*. Matt received his MFA in creative writing from San Diego State University and his BA from the University of the Pacific where he attended school on a full basketball scholarship. de la Peña currently lives in Brooklyn NY. He teaches creative writing and visits high schools and colleges throughout the country.

Matt Inspiration:

In an interview with the ALAN Review, Matt De La Peña states in the book *We Were Here*, "I gave his main Character Miguel the *Color Purple* to read because of the impact the book had on him after going through high school as a reluctant reader. At first I was reading it and I was like, hey what's going on, why would she me this book? This woman can't even speak proper English. But for the first time in my life, I finished a book in two days. That character moved me so much I couldn't believe it. I was about to cry at the end... and so *The Color Purple* is still –to this day, I feel like I owe so much to that novel. It totally changed my way of looking at books.

This is why I decided to do an Annotated Bibliography of Matt De La Peña books and books that relate or are similar to theme Matt is trying to illustrate in his

books. In all honesty, Matt De la Peña has moved me just like *The Color Purple* moved Matt De La Peña to become the great writer he is today.

Theme: Writing about the Forgotten Kids

The idea to write about the kids that seem to be forgotten by society, who are darker and the ones who do worse in school are deep in that dismissed group. Matt tries to give the real kids who live in low-income urban communities a voice, give a middle class reader a glimpse. Matt novels give readers insight into the motives behind his characters decisions, goals and dreams. Matt states, “I’ve always thought it was super important, out of respect, that I show the Forgotten kids, the group with less potential. Because I really think there is beauty there, too. And grace. And Dignity.

Walker, Alice. *Color Purple*. 1982.

Summary: tells the story of Celie, a Black woman in the South. Celie writes letters to God in which she tells about her life--her roles as daughter, wife, sister, and mother. In the course of her story, Celie meets a series of other Black women who shape her life: Nettie, Celie's sister, who becomes a missionary teacher in Africa; Throughout the story, though, Celie is the center of this community of women, the one who knows how to survive.

It is such a moving story, Celie goes through so much and still manage to be happy about being with her sister. The book shows how we can go through pain and suffer but it is in our selves to find happiness.

De La Peña, Matt. *We Were Here*. New York: Random House Inc. Print.

Summary: From the streets of Stockton to the beaches of Venice, all the way down to the Mexican border, *We Were Here* follows a journey of self-discovery by a boy who is trying to forgive himself in an unforgiving world. The story of one boy and his journey to find himself. When it happened, Miguel was sent to Juvi. The judge gave him a year in a group home - said he had to write a journal so some counselor could try to figure out how he thinks. The judge had no idea that he actually did Miguel a favor. Ever since it happened, his mom can't even look him in the face. Any home besides his would be a better place to live. But Miguel didn't bet on meeting Dondell or Mong or any of what happened after they broke out. He only thought about going to Mexico and getting to the border where he could start over. Forget his mom. Forget his brother. Forget himself. Life usually doesn't work out how you think it will, though. And most of the time, running away is the quickest path right back to what you're running from.

Critique: Crippling secrets burden the teenagers and drive the plots of Matt de la Peña's young adult novels. In *We Were Here*, the central character, Miguel, indicates that he is stuck in a group home and is cut off from his family, because he did something terrible. Readers don't learn what it is until the bittersweet end.

We Were Here places Miguel in situation where no person would ever want to be. He goes through a journey and from that journey grows as a person and made a good moral decision that not everyone would do in his situation. It was a great book to read and I truly enjoyed it.

Steinbeck, John. *Of Mice and Men*. New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Penguin Books, 1994.

Print.

Summary: tells the tragic story of George Milton and Lennie Small, two displaced migrant ranch workers, who move from place to place in search of new job opportunities during the Great Depression in California.

During the Great Depression two men move from place to place trying to find jobs or an opportunity and running away from their past.

Similarities: In both books, *We Were Here and Of Mice and Men* the main characters were running away from their past. In both their journeys the character met new friends and hiding their deep dark secrets.

De La Peña, Matt. *Mexican Whiteboy*. New York: Random House Inc. Print

Summary: Danny's tall and skinny. Even though he's not built, his arms are long enough to give his pitch a power so fierce any college scout would sign him on the spot. A 95 mph fastball, but the boy's not even on a team. Every time he gets up on the mound he loses it. But at private school, they don't expect much else from him. Danny's brown. Half-Mexican brown. And growing up in San Diego that close to the border means everyone else knows exactly who he is before he even opens his mouth. Before they find out he can't speak Spanish, and before they realize his mom has blonde hair and blue eyes, they've got him pegged. Danny's convinced it's his whiteness that sent his father back to Mexico. And that's why he's spending the summer with his dad's family. Only, to find himself, he might just have to face the demons he refuses to see right in front of his face. And open up to a friendship he never saw coming.

Danny is a Mexican-American trying to be more Mexican than White, he doesn't feel welcome in his private school because they see him as a Mexican. And he wants to fit in with his father's family in National City but the people there see him as a Whiteboy.

Critique: School Library Journal- A first-rate exploration of self-identity.

Cisneros, Sandra. *House on Mango Street*. New York : Vintage Books, 1991. Print.

Summary: The beginning of this book introduces us to a collection of characters and explores their cultural backgrounds and how they are affected by poverty, exile, and the restrictions of prescribed gender roles. Esperanza is a little girl who moves with her family to a house on Mango Street. It's a small, crumbling red house in a poor urban neighborhood – not at all what Esperanza had been hoping for when her parents promised to move the family to a house. Esperanza, who's often followed by her younger sister Nenny, meets the other residents of Mango Street and describes their often difficult lives in a series of vignettes, or short sketches. Most of the neighborhood's residents are Hispanic, including Esperanza, whose father is a Mexican immigrant and whose mother is Latina.

A young little girl who lives on Mango Street, Her family dream was the American dream. White picket fence, two car garage and 4 bed room house. Unfortunately that wasn't Esperanza's dream. She wanted to stay true to her culture and traditions.

Testa, Maria. *Becoming Joe DiMaggio*. Candlewick Press, 2002.

Summary: Spare, simple poems tell a boy's moving story in this short novel about baseball, family, and the American dream. It's 1936, and the Yankees have just

hired a star center fielder whose name sounds like music. What could be a better time for Papa-Angelo's grandson to be born? Christened after the legendary ballplayer, young Joseph Paul learns much at his Italian grandfather's knee - about holding your breath in front of the radio during a 3-2 count with the bases loaded and having the audacity to dream big dreams. After all, the boy's ne'er-do-well father is out of the picture, and it is Papa-Angelo's job to teach his grandson what it means to be a hero.

In a poignant novel told in verse, Maria Testa paints a picture of a timeless bond between a grandson and his immigrant grandfather - and of finding his own place in a brave new world.

Evans, David M. *Sand Lot*. Film. 1993

Summary: Scotty Smalls moves to a new neighborhood with his mom and stepdad, and wants to learn to play baseball. The neighborhood baseball guru Rodriquez takes Smalls under his wing, and soon he's part of the local baseball buddies. They fall into adventures involving baseball, treehouse sleep-ins, the desirous lifeguard at the local pool, the snooty rival ball team, and the travelling fair. Beyond the fence at the back of the sandlot menaces a legendary ball-eating dog called The Beast, and the kids inevitably must deal with him.

In the film baseball is what brought the children of the neighborhood together, Mexicans, Blacks and whites to become friends because of one sport. They spent the whole summer playing baseball everyday.

De La Peña, Matt. *Ball Don't Lie*. New York: Random House Inc. Print.

Summary: Sticky is a beat-around-the-head foster kid with nowhere to call home but the street, and an outer shell so tough that no one will take him in. He started out life so far behind the pack that the finish line seems nearly unreachable. He's a white boy living and playing in a world where he doesn't seem to belong. But Sticky can ball. And basketball might just be his ticket out . . . if he can only realize that he doesn't have to be the person everyone else expects him to be.

Matt de la Peña, *Ball Don't Lie* takes place where the street and the court meet and where a boy can be anything if he puts his mind to it. Even a white foster kid who can ball it up on the basketball court but no one thinks he play.

Critiques: A sad, sweet book about a young foster kid growing up on basketball and the streets." — Newsweek

"An inspiring story. Sticky is a true original, and de la peña has skillfully brought him to life." — School Library Journal, (Starred)

"The characters live and breathe. . . . This is a must-read." — The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

"De la Peña does an excellent job of combining the streets with the sport. Gritty and mesmerizing." — Kirkus Reviews

De La Peña, Matt. *I Will Save You*. New York: Random House Inc.

Summary: Kidd is running from his past and his future. No mom, no dad, and there's nothing for him at the group home but therapy. He doesn't belong at the beach where he works either, unless he finds a reason to stay. Olivia is blond hair, blue eyes, rich dad. The prettiest girl in Cardiff. She's hiding something from Kidd—but could they ever be together anyway? Devon is mean, mysterious, and driven by a death wish. A best friend and worst enemy.

I Will Save You, tells the story of a boy with none to support him mentally or physically. He does not seem to belong anywhere. He has a best friend but also his worst enemy.

Critique: “The intriguing, well-developed characters introduce themes of class and gender friction, creating a puzzling and sobering yet strangely hopeful book that will stay with readers.” –Booklist

Crutcher, Chris. *Whale Talk*. First HarperTeen. 2009. Printed

Summary: At Cutter High, earning a sports jacket is the most prestigious of all symbols, the "shroud of Turin" as T. J. calls it. It also symbolizes discriminatory attitudes and close-mindedness that T. J. vehemently despises. In order to break the power this group has within Cutter High and to get revenge for the abuses he has suffered in life, T. J. makes it his quest to earn a letter jacket for every member of the swim team, a group of emotionally and physically handicapped teenagers.

Whale Talk is the story of Tao Jones, better known as T. J., and a group of high school misfits who are brought together to form an unusual swim team for Cutter High School.

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