

# Luis Alberto Urrea Biography

Source: [www.Litlovers.com](http://www.Litlovers.com)



Luis Alberto Urrea, 2005 Pulitzer Prize finalist for nonfiction and member of the Latino Literature Hall of Fame, is a prolific and acclaimed writer who uses his dual-culture life experiences to explore greater themes of love, loss and triumph.

Born in Tijuana, Mexico to a Mexican father and an American mother, Urrea has published extensively in all the major genres and is currently published by Little, Brown and Company.

The critically acclaimed author of 11 books, Urrea is an award-winning poet and essayist. *The Devil's Highway*, his 2004 non-fiction account of a group of Mexican immigrants lost in the Arizona desert, won the 2004 Lannan Literary Award and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the Pacific Rim Kiriama Prize. A national best-seller, *The Devil's Highway* was also named a best book of the year by the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Miami Herald*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Kansas City Star* and many other publications.

Urrea's first book, *Across the Wire*, was named a *New York Times* Notable Book and won the Christopher Award. Urrea also won a 1999 American Book Award for his memoir, *Nobody's Son: Notes from an American Life* and in 2000, he was voted into the Latino Literature Hall of Fame following the publication of *Vatos*. His book of short stories, *Six Kinds of Sky*, was named the 2002 small-press Book of the Year in fiction by the editors of *ForeWord* magazine. He has also won a Western States Book Award in poetry for *The Fever of Being* and was in *The 1996 Best American Poetry* collection.

Urrea's 2005 book, *The Hummingbird's Daughter*, is the culmination of 20 years of research and writing. The historical novel tells the story of Teresa Urrea, sometimes known as *The Saint of Cabora* and the Mexican Joan of Arc. Urrea attended the University of California at San Diego, earning an undergraduate degree in writing, and did his graduate studies at the University of Colorado-Boulder.

# Book Summary

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Nineteen-year-old Nayeli works at a taco shop in her Mexican village and dreams about her father, who journeyed to the US to find work. Recently, it has dawned on her that he isn't the only man who has left town.

In fact, there are almost no men in the village—they've all gone north. While watching *The Magnificent Seven*, Nayeli decides to go north herself and recruit seven men—her own "Siete Magníficos"—to repopulate her hometown and protect it from the bandidos who plan on taking it over.

Filled with unforgettable characters and prose as radiant as the Sinaloan sun, *Into the Beautiful North* is the story of an irresistible young woman's quest to find herself on both sides of the fence. (From the publisher.)

# Discussion Questions

Source: [www.LitLovers.com](http://www.LitLovers.com)

1. *Into the Beautiful North* tells the exceptional story of a small group's successful mission to save their village in its bleakest hour. What are some of the other themes that Luis Alberto Urrea unpacks along the way?
2. Language and dialect play an integral role in the novel's style. Spanish words and phonetic spellings are laced throughout, and Spanglish and slang are used on both sides of the border. What does Urrea achieve by mixing language in this way? What does it say about the ability of language to bridge—or not to bridge—cultural gaps?
3. *Into the Beautiful North* is divided into two parts—Sur and Norte. References to American pop culture abound in the first half as Nayeli and her friends speak of life across the border with unwavering certainty. Where do their ideas of America come from? How does the reality of their time in the U.S. compare to their initial ideas of it? Are they surprised or disappointed?

4. Nayeli tells García-García, “Perhaps it is time for a new kind of femininity?” What does she mean? Given the homage to *The Magnificent Seven* and *Seven Samurai* in the novel, how has Urrea played with gender stereotypes?

5. *Into the Beautiful North* examines physical and psychological borders. Urrea repeatedly shows that while the physical borders can be crossed, some that are culturally defined appear unbridgeable. What are those culturally defined differences, and do you think it’s possible to eradicate such invisible borders?

6. After traveling thousands of miles in search of her father, Nayeli is unable to confront him. In your opinion, does she make the right decision to heed his words at this time—“all things must pass”—or should she have approached him?

7. What do you make of the overwhelming turnout produced by Aunt Irma’s interviews? Why do so many men want to return to Mexico, and does this strike you as ironic?

8. Nayeli and her friends are inspired by the movie *The Magnificent Seven*, a remake of the Japanese film *Seven Samurai*. Both films climax with the showdown between good guys and bad guys, but Urrea ends his novel before such a clash. Why do you think he did so?

9. Were you surprised to find the Mexican characters so knowledgeable about American pop culture? If you were surprised, did it change how you think about Mexico?

10. Where did your family emigrate from? Did you recognize any parallels between your family stories and this one?

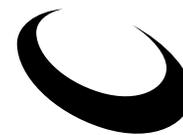


# Book Club in a Bag

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## *Into the Beautiful North* by Luis Alberto Urrea

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