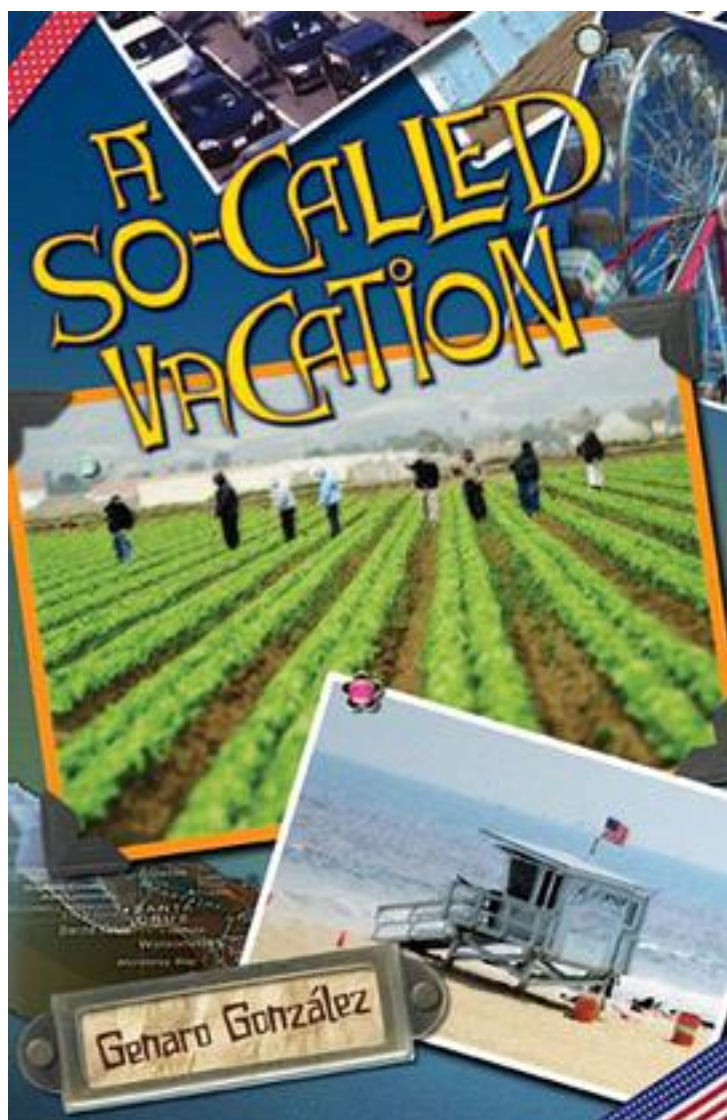


A So-Called Vacation



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出版者:

出版时间:

装帧:

isbn:9781558855458

Brothers Gabriel and Gustavo, high school students in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas, are horrified when their father suggests that they spend the summer in California doing field work to earn extra money. They're not immigrants; the boys and their younger sister Paula were born in Texas, and the idea of picking fruits and vegetables--hard labor usually associated with undocumented workers--is totally humiliating. But their father thinks working in the fields will be good for his children. After all, the experience didn't hurt him when he was a kid. "Look at me. I didn't die. All that work made me stronger." Gustavo, heading into his senior year, doesn't want to leave his girlfriend. And what will all his friends think? Gabriel doesn't care what anyone thinks; he's just not interested in spending the summer doing back-breaking labor. It's only when the promise of visiting Disneyland, after working the fields, is offered that they ultimately agree to the "vacation." Before long the family finds itself in a migrant camp, living in a shack with no electricity or bathroom. Toiling in the fields by day, trying to get the hang of picking strawberries, the boys and their father attempt to make sense of it all, including the motives and hopes of their fellow workers: the manic Borrado brothers, who are the fastest pickers around, and Victor, who introduces them to the canal where the migrant teens swim, even though two boys drowned there last season. Unfortunately, while learning their way around town, the family members experience the racism frequently directed at recent immigrants. How often, Gabriel wonders, has he done the same thing and dismissed someone just for being in the U.S. illegally? In this illuminating novel for teens that sheds light on the subjects of immigrant labor and prejudice within the Hispanic community, Genaro Gonzalez blends the ageless theme of fathers and sons at odds with a contemporary issue weighing on many minds. While set in a place unfamiliar to many, the characters' hopes and dreams for the future will resonate with young adult readers.

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目录:

[A So-Called Vacation_ 下载链接1](#)

标签

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书评

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