

The Mosquito Coast is told by Allie's oldest child, Charlie, told from the perspective of a twelve year-old boy whose devotion to his father is fuelled by a combination of awe and fear. Although he's still a boy, Charlie worries like an old man, mostly about what his father is going to do next. "My father didn't care what anyone thought. And I envied him for being so free, and hated myself for feeling ashamed." Allie, or Father, likes to keep Charlie with him, almost constantly pelting Charlie with his philosophies and his ideas, and challenging the boy to feats that would test the nerve of a "Fear Factor" contestant.

This story could have been the precursor to other reality shows as well, like the participants on *Survivor* learn, when all you have to live on is one's wits, they can become a little "whacked". When they first arrive, they settle their own little village, Jeronimo. They have brought just minimal camping gear, hybrid seeds and hydrogen and ammonia, the ingredients to build a giant ice making machine.

Things start out well in Jeronimo, though, and the family flourishes with the irrigation and plumbing system, and plenty of ice to trade with the locals. Whenever they can, though, Charlie and his younger brother and sisters sneak away to their own little camp where they have created an "anti"-Jeronimo with schools and churches and commerce, all things their father despises.

With the dry season comes difficulty. Things go downhill rapidly, and from that point on there is a change in Father that seriously frightens Charlie and his brother. Living conditions continue to deteriorate as Father drives his family deeper into the forest.

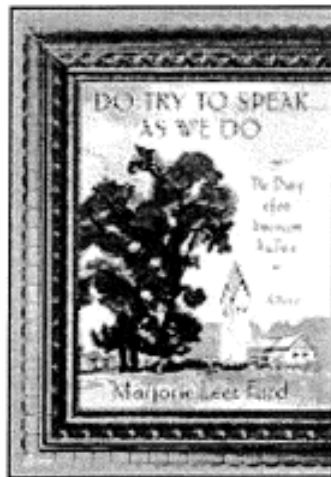
Charlie describes his father's struggle with trying to prove his convictions while witnessing their destructive reality. At the same time, he relays his own struggle between the faith in and the fear of his Father's genius. Along the way, he also provides a clear illustration of how brutal the tropical environment of Honduras can be. The landscape becomes a living thing, another character in the book, but one that cannot be tamed or domesticated. One must surrender to it in order to survive.

Do try to Speak as we do, Diary of an American Au pair **Marjorie Leet Ford**

Thomas Dunne Books, NY 2001
Ages 16+
346 pages

After losing her job and postponing her wedding, Melissa escapes San Francisco to take up employment as an *au pair* in Britain.

When she first arrives in London, Melissa's lovely notions about her nanny adventure are shattered. The home is dreary and worn and she is constantly chilled by the cold dampness. When she meets the Haig-Ereildouns, she and Mrs. Haig-Ereildoun taking an instant disliking to each other, but Mr. Haig-Ereildoun is friendly and casual and seemingly oblivious to the tension in the household.



The youngest of Mr. Haig-Ereildoun's three children is three year-old Claire. She is deaf and Melissa is charged with teaching her to speak – but to “speak as we do”, not like an American, which Mrs. implies would be a most unwelcome occurrence. The children are all very intelligent. Peru is the oldest at 11 and Trevor is 9. They are already aware that as an *au pair*, Melissa is considered of a lower class than her employers. Angus Haig-Ereildoun is a Member of Parliament with a seat in Scotland, so their time is spent half in London and half at their country home, Troonfachan, outside Bridie in Aberdeenshire.

As the family travels from London to Scotland with several county homes in between, Melissa writes about

everything in letters and on little blue note pads. She adores the old rooms, the antiques, the history and the food, and fills volumes with delicious descriptions. The problem of a culture clash has much more to do with her status than with any of the living conditions. As a guest of the Haig-Ereildoun family, she is considered an aristocrat, but as their *au pair*, she a servant. Being an American doesn't often help get her accepted into either circle.

Kirriebairn is the “castle” that belongs to family friends, the Von Tepliz's, who live on the Isle of Islay in the Hebrides. Their lifestyle is much more affluent than the Haig-Ereildouns, although Mrs. Haig-Ereildouns insinuates that their family is actually of greater stature. And to see her parents, Lady Chipchase and Sir Chester, she is indeed correct. As we read about Melissa's various encounters we learn how complicated the class system is, and no one seems to struggle with it more than Mrs. Haig-Ereildoun.

Although Melissa is met with almost unanimous contempt by the women, she finds solace in her long distance relationship with her fiancé Tedward, a San Francisco artist. Increasingly, however, she is attracted to Simon, an eccentric, but very cute, scientist in London.

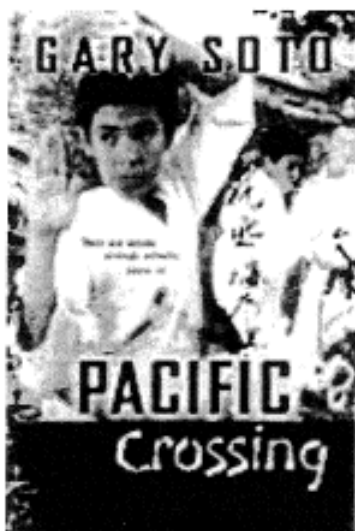
During her stay, Melissa is constantly faced with contradictions to her preconceptions. The food is not bland and awful, in fact it is so good she gains nearly two stone (twenty pounds). Politicians are paid almost nothing, but people “of class” live off their inheritance, not their salary. Even the upper class won't spend their money on

basic conveniences like central heat, hot water or dishwashers. *Do Speak as We Do* is a delightful book, funny and spirited. The characters are full and fresh, so much so that even the stereotypes are unexpected. Although a fun read, it also has moments of sadness and just a touch of lust.

While *Do Speak as We Do* may not be the best advertisement for the *au pair* profession, it certainly does a great job of promoting the United Kingdom as a travel destination.

Pacific Crossing **Soto, Gary**

Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Rolando
Florida 1992
Ages 10 – 14
126 pages



Lincoln Mendoza and his best friend Tony Contreras are best buddies, “barrio brothers” from San Francisco. They are chosen to participate in an exchange to Japan because of their interest in Kempo – a form of Japanese martial art. Lincoln is apprehensive that

his Mexican heritage will confuse his host family, but the Onos turn out to be very accepting.

Lincoln learns about his new family while working with his Japanese brother Mitsuo, on the family “farm”. The field is about one acre and the two boys work with their mother, weeding and tilling by hand. They are a family of labourers who epitomize the industrious ideals of the Japanese society for Lincoln. But Lincoln learns that there are facets to the Japanese people he did not expect, like their sense of humour, their easy going nature and their acceptance of women in traditionally male roles.

Lincoln has only mild culture shock over the public bath houses and getting his long dark hair closely shaved. His family tries to provide him with as much of a Japanese experience as possible, but the camping trip gets cut short, and the Sumo wrestling matches are even shorter.

Pacific Crossing is a straightforward book, but it lacks good descriptions of the landscape, the town or even the home where Lincoln comes to live. The exchange focuses mostly on the way the boys learn to communicate by sharing their language, both traditional and slang. They enjoy bantering back and forth in English, Japanese and Spanish, and there is a glossary at the back that includes both Spanish and Japanese.

The hosts, though humble, are gracious, and they try to infuse as much of the Japanese experience into Lincoln’s visit as possible. But six weeks is a very short time to get a real