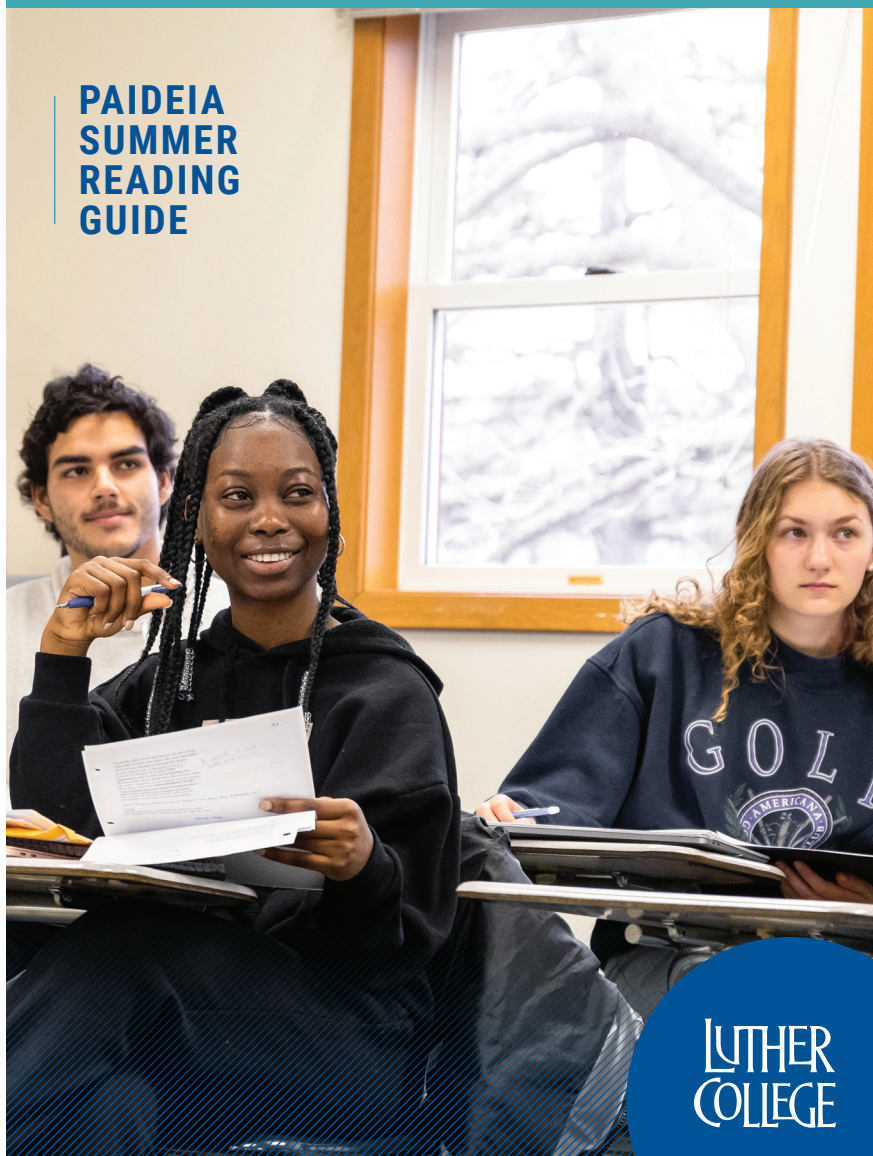


Designed

FOR EXPLORATION

PAIDEIA SUMMER READING GUIDE



LUTHER
COLLEGE

LUTHER COLLEGE 2023 SUMMER READING

SOLITO: A MEMOIR

BY JAVIER ZAMORA

Reading Guide by Kathryn Reed, Paideia director

The Paideia program is happy to provide you with your own copy of the 2023 summer reading and this Reading Guide to go along with it. Javier Zamora's *Solito: A Memoir* is your first reading assignment for Paideia. You and the entire first-year class plus many faculty, staff, and Decorah community members will share the experience of reading and discussing this powerful book.

It begins this way: "Trip. My parents started using that word about a year ago—'one day, you'll take a trip to be with us. Like an adventure.'"

Javier Zamora's "adventure" is a 3,000-mile journey from his small town in El Salvador, through Guatemala and Mexico, and across the U.S. border. At nine years old, he leaves behind his beloved aunt and grandparents to reunite with a mother who left four years ago and a father he barely remembers. Traveling alone amid a group of strangers and a "coyote" hired to lead them to safety, Javier expects his trip to last two short weeks. He cannot foresee the perilous boat trips, relentless desert treks, pointed guns, arrests, and deceptions that await him, nor can he know that those two weeks will expand into two life-altering months alongside fellow migrants who will come to encircle him like an unexpected family.

(This summary is adapted from the Penguin Random House First Year and Common Reading Guide, written by Rachel Zafir.)

For Paideia students at Luther College, *Solito* introduces the “Enduring Question” that will connect all of the texts we’ll read together this year: “What is the Common Good?” Far from addressing the question in an abstract way, Zamora’s memoir gets at it from a personal level: How does one child experience and survive the trauma of migration? What brings him comfort, support, and strength? As readers walking in the nine-year-old Zamora’s shoes, what can we begin to understand about the systems that fail him? A Unicef report from 2020 states that “among the world’s migrants are nearly 34 million refugees and asylum seekers who have been forcibly displaced from their own countries—half of them children” (data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/migration).

Given this reality, how can we imagine a world where all children share in the common good of a safe place to live and a family and society that care for them?



Photo by Gerardo Del Valle

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Javier Zamora was born in El Salvador in 1990. His father fled the country when he was one, and his mother when he was about to turn five. Both parents' migrations were caused by the U.S.-funded Salvadoran Civil War. When he was nine, Javier migrated through Guatemala, Mexico, and the Sonoran Desert. His debut poetry collection, *Unaccompanied*, explores the impact of the war and immigration on his family. Zamora has been a Stegner Fellow at Stanford and a Radcliffe Fellow at Harvard and holds fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation.

READING SOLITO

Many will find the subject matter of migration and childhood trauma to be emotionally difficult. We encourage you to talk with others as you read. Allow yourself plenty of time to read the book in segments, and to process in between. We'll provide opportunities for discussion of the topics it raises, both inside and outside of class, when you arrive on campus.

In addition, the book will provide a challenge for those who don't speak or read Spanish as there are many untranslated Spanish words, phrases, and sentences. Why Zamora chose to do this as a writer will be a topic of class discussion. Have a device on hand to translate if you feel you need to, but also trust that Zamora's writing is so compelling that the story will carry you through without needing to translate every word.

We are excited to announce that Javier Zamora will join us on campus for the fall 2023 Opening Convocation as well as an on-stage interview and book signing.

PREPARE FOR CLASS

Our conversation about Zamora's book will begin during New Student Orientation. Because the orientation schedule is full of events, you will need to complete your reading of *Solito* before the start of orientation on Saturday, August 26. Paideia is a course that builds skills in reading, writing, and discussing. **By following the tips in the Guide to Annotating Texts, and writing down thoughtful answers to the questions included below, you'll** come ready to talk and write more about the book. We'll expect to see your book marked up and this Reading Guide in hand with your answers to the questions written on it and ready to discuss at your first Paideia class on Monday, August 28.

READING QUESTIONS

1. What are three passages (segments of several sentences or a paragraph) that stand out to you from different places in the book? As you read, mark places with a star that strike you as especially meaningful or beautiful. Below, choose three of those spots, and give a page number and the first few words of the passage. To prepare for discussion, write a sentence or two about why you chose that particular spot.

2. Chapter One describes Zamora's life in his family and community in El Salvador. List some aspects of his life that you can tell were important to him, and include the page numbers where you found them. If you were nine-year-old Zamora, what would be the hardest things to leave behind?

3. In Chapter Two, how does Zamora's relationship with his grandfather change during the first leg of the journey and their waiting period in Guatemala? Mark passages in the chapter that capture aspects of their relationship, and for practice, write 3–4 sentences about their changing relationship using quoted phrases from those passages.

4. Who are "The Six" that emerge as a group in Chapter Three? Write down the names of each of the five (not counting Zamora) and a short description of them—what do they look like, and how does Zamora perceive them?

5. In Chapter Four, how are “The Six” identified to be removed from the bus at the checkpoint, and how do they eventually keep from being deported? Who is Zamora calling on when he says to himself “*Cadejo, Cadejito*” (refer back to p. 60)?

6. What are some of the more normal activities that Zamora and his group do during the period described in Chapter Five? Give some examples, with page numbers. Translate Carla's "go to joke": *Mucho nadar se va a ahogar usted*. What does it say about the relationship between Carla and her mom, Patricia?

7. In Chapter Six, how is the group prepared in practical ways for the upcoming walk across the desert? What are Zamora's emotions during this period?

8. Who are *La Migra* and how do they affect Zamora's first experiences in "La USA"? What is an image that will stay with you from Chapter Seven?

9. In Chapter Eight, who is Coco Liso, and what is he like?
How and why does he finally take leave of the group?

10. Read and absorb Chapter Nine through the end of the book (don't miss the epilogue, dated April 5, 2021).
What feelings are you left with?

READING IN PAIDEIA: AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO ANNOTATING YOUR TEXT

This year in Paideia, you will develop new reading processes that help you engage with and retain the material you've been assigned. Learning to write as you read will help you deepen your engagement with what you're reading. This writing can take multiple forms: marginal notes or annotations, reading notes that you keep in a separate notebook, or short writing assignments that your instructor assigns in class. The writing you do as you read will give you confidence to share your ideas in class discussion and will be a useful tool when studying for exams or preparing essays.

I PLAN TO SELL MY BOOKS BACK. I CAN'T MARK IN THEM, RIGHT?

According to JoAnn Uhlenhake, the textbook buyer in the Luther College Book Shop, books can be sold back to the bookstore with a reasonable amount of underlining and marginal notes: "Buyers will only refuse, or perhaps offer less, if the book is damaged either with missing or ripped pages, water damage, and highlighting so excessive that is difficult for the next person to use." *According to JoAnn, water/liquid damage is what most often keeps students from getting money back for their books.*

WHAT IF I'VE RENTED MY TEXTBOOKS?

The same guidelines apply to rented books. "Even if we rent a new book, we expect to get a 'used' book back when students are finished using it," JoAnn explains.

Below are a few examples of habits that have proven helpful for your Paideia professors. As a reader, you'll have to develop your own system, one that is sustainable and one that reflects your style of note-taking, which will take some practice. Hopefully these examples will give you some new approaches to try.

Friday, October 30

• Darwin, Charles. "Excerpts from Chs. IV, VI, XIV," *On the Origin of Species* (Reader 54-70)

5. What is natural selection and how does it work to the advantage of some members of a species and not others? How does the length of time and the way in which natural selection works compare to the work of domestication that humans undertake? Why does Darwin argue that nature selects only the "good" for each species? Compare to domestication
6. What is sexual selection and how does it compare to natural selection in the creation of species? What different roles does Darwin attribute to males and females in the process of sexual selection? What do you think about these ideas? What are the roles
7. What does Darwin mean by the term coadaptation? How does this explain relationships between different species of plants and animals and their natural environments? How is coadaptation related to natural and sexual selection? What is the relationship
8. How does Darwin's metaphor of life being like the branches of a tree or bush challenge biblical explanations of the creation of life? What does it imply about the way in which different species relate to each other? relate to bible

A GUIDED START: USING READING QUESTIONS

I've never written anything down while I read. Where can I begin, especially with a Paideia text that is giving me some difficulty?

The questions in this Reading Guide, and in the Paideia Reader that you'll purchase with your other course texts, will help provide you with focus and direction as you read. These questions highlight important moments and ideas in the text that you should plan to keep an eye out for. Preview the reading questions before you complete a reading assignment. See if you can distill a keyword or phrase from the question; write that word or phrase in the margin of your reader or on a sticky note that you can use as a bookmark.

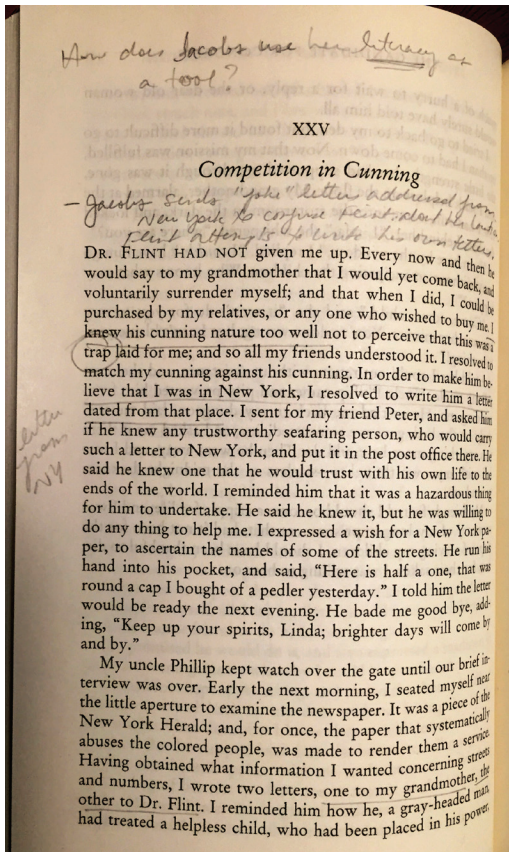
As you read, identify and mark passages that fit each question's main idea.

A simple way to begin annotating might be to list the question number in the margin and then add a note about what the text is showing you where a given keyword or theme is concerned. This method will help alert you to particular themes or significant events that might help guide your reading.

THE “WHAT HAPPENED” APPROACH: SUMMARIZING AS YOU GO

There seems to be a lot going on in this text. How can I use notes to follow the action?

Tracking the action in a text can give you a good idea of where to begin jotting down notes. For Marie Drews, associate professor of English, writing summary notes and questions in the white space at the beginnings or endings of chapters is a common practice. “Especially when I am reading a text for the first time, it’s useful for me to write down phrases and sentences that capture what happened in a given chapter after I’ve finished reading it. Having these notes available makes it easy to remind myself where certain events take place in a book. If I step away from the text for a bit, reviewing my summary statements helps me get back in the action. And these notes also give me a jumping-off point to jot down questions regarding a major idea or problem that might be playing out in a given chapter.”

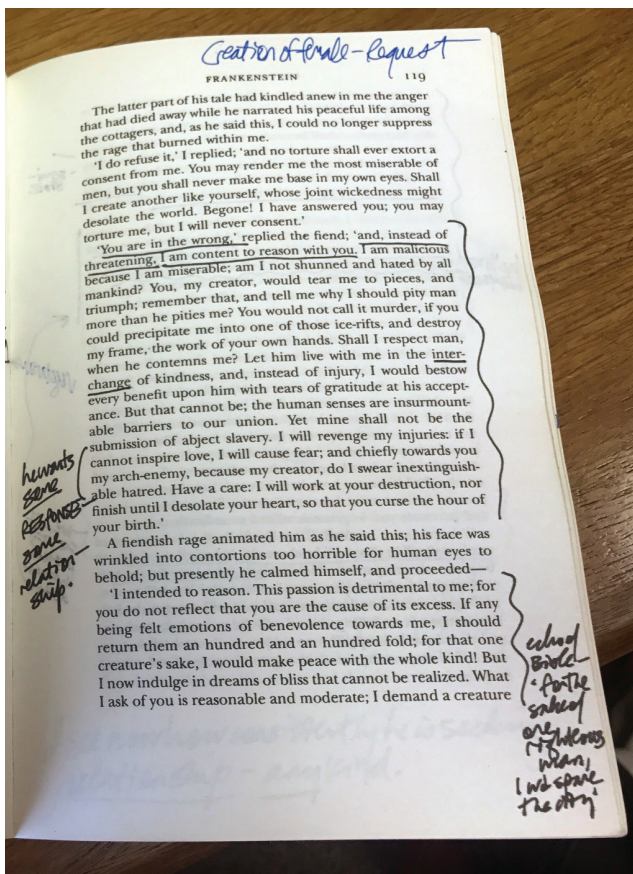


ADDING IN WHAT "I SAY": TAKING DESCRIPTIVE AND EVALUATIVE NOTES

I'm getting in the swing of writing as I read. How can I develop my process further?

Amy Weldon, professor of English, has two different types of notes that she takes as she reads.

Descriptive: I write at the top of the page a literal description of something important whose location I want to remember: "First conversation with Creature," "Definition of 'Armenian,'" "first sight of Turkey." This will help me find that passage quickly when I flip



back through. I also make careful note of passages we talked about in class: I tell students that if it's on the board, it needs to be in your text/underlining/notes.

Evaluative/creative: I underline, write comments about, and otherwise flag a spot where my own attention spikes: "This reminds me of . . ." "This makes me think about . . ." "This hearkens back to that other place on p. 31 where she talks about this . . ." "If I were writing a paper on a broader issue within this text, this is a passage I would use." "We talked about this in class and so I want to remember where it is and think about it some more."