

Immersion
by
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Oakland, California, present day. A tiny, windowless kitchen. The radio is blaring Spanish talk radio.

MOISES, 10 years old, Latino, radiant, dressed for school, is sitting at the breakfast table. He quickly works on his math homework, with squares of numbers - we can see he is good at math.

His brother LUIS, 20, burly, dressed in coveralls, pushes past him and ruffles his hair. Moises has a privileged place at the kitchen table. Most of the table is taken up by his books, leaving almost no room for the others to sit. As his family moves around in the tiny room, they carefully avoid bumping him.

Moises' MOTHER, 40's, Latina, is cooking breakfast. She is already dressed for work as a cleaner. Moises' FATHER, dressed for construction work, is fixing a leaky tap.

FATHER
¿Qué estas estudiando?

SUBTITLE
What are you studying?

He hands a wrench to Luis.

MOISES
Hoy hay un exámen de matemáticas.

SUBTITLE
It's a math test today.

Luis puts the wrench on top of Moises' work. Moises' mother moves the wrench so it's on top of the comic book Luis is reading.

MOTHER
¿Tu primer prueba en Estados Unidos, uh?

SUBTITLE
Your first test in America, uh?

FATHER
Dale otro huevo al muchacho - para que le de energía.

SUBTITLE
Give the man another egg. He needs energy.

Moises smiles as he eats his eggs.

It's still dark on the street as Moises and Luis walk along. Moises is playing soccer with a stone. He skillfully passes it to Luis, who clumsily kicks it on ahead.

The stone clangs loudly into the front gate of Moises' school. In the dark it looks monumental.

A SENIOR JANITOR is waiting for Luis with a big bunch of keys. He unlocks the gate and he and Luis go in.

Moises happily sits down in front of the gate and opens up his book. He reads it by the light of the security lamp.

3

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

3

A practice test is dumped on a student's desk by MS. PETERSON, 30's. It says "Mathematics - California Aptitude Test - Practice Questions". Ms. Peterson is idealistic and an excellent teacher, but worn down.

In this scene, we start out seeing things from Ms. Peterson's point of view, then we shift to Moises' point of view.

As she returns to the front of the class, Ms. Peterson addresses her overcrowded class of multi-racial 10 year olds. It's clear that the test is an unwelcome interruption to her normal routine.

MS. PETERSON

We have testing all this week and next week.

Some kids groan.

MS. PETERSON

The test is hard, but I know you're going to try your best. Aren't you, Bry'Ana?

BRY'ANA stops talking to his neighbor.

BRY'ANA

Yes, Ms. Peterson.

Moises, sitting at the back of the class, looks enthusiastically at the test. Most of the other kids are still playing around.

Moises looks at Ms. Peterson. He can hardly understand anything she is saying.

MS. PETERSON

This isn't the real test, it's a practice test. The real test is going to be this afternoon. So instead of reading this morning, we're going to look at the practice test.

As we now move completely into Moises' point of view, we hear her voice become distorted, like it is mixed with water sounds. Moises doesn't speak English.

Ms. Peterson makes a gesture to open the test.

MS. PETERSON

Let's open up the practice test,
and look at the first question, on
page 3.

The kids open their tests. Moises leans across to speak to ALICIA, Latina.

MOISES

¿Qué dijo? ¿Va a comenzar el
exámen?

SUBTITLE

What's she saying? Is the
test starting?

ALICIA

No, es un exámen de practica.

SUBTITLE

No, it's a practice test.

MS. PETERSON

The boy ran three blocks. Write
that on your scratch paper.

Moises smiles at the word "Mathematics" on the front page. His smile freezes on his face as he turns one page, two pages, three pages.

It's all word problems, in English.

We see the words from Moises' point of view. Moises tries to focus on the first problem. It says "A boy ran three blocks in six minutes. If he continued to run at the same speed, how long did it take him to run the next twenty blocks?" The words "boy" "three" and "six" jump out, but the rest looks like a sea of floating letters, slowly moving around.

Moises looks up at Ms. Peterson. He can't understand her. He is drowning.

MS. PETERSON

And then we read on and we find out
that that took - how long,
Michelle?

On the whiteboard, Ms. Peterson has already written (before the lesson started):

WHITEBOARD TEXT:

Boy ran 3 blocks
3 blocks in 6 minutes
20 blocks in ? minutes

Moises looks at the word "ran" on the whiteboard. His heart races. He starts working at a million miles per hour to figure out what the words mean. Meanwhile the lesson continues, with:

MICHELLE

6 minutes.

MS. PETERSON

6 minutes, yes. So we write 3 blocks in 6 minutes.

While the above is going on, Moises scans the walls of the class, looking for clues. He sees a poster that says:

POSTER:

He runs -> he ran -> he was running -> he had run

The word "ran" lights up. The poster has a stick figure drawing of a man running. The drawing waves at Moises and runs on the spot.

Moises looks at the word "blocks". He quickly looks across to the corner of the room where there are plastic counting blocks for math, along with other math tools. He looks back at the drawing of the man running. He is now laboring along, holding a big thousands block.

Moises leans towards Alicia.

MOISES

¿Por qué corre con los bloques?

SUBTITLE

Why does he run with the blocks?

ALICIA

¿Qué?

SUBTITLE

What?

MOISES

¿Por qué corre con los bloques?

SUBTITLE

Why does he run with the blocks?

ENRIQUE, 10 years old, Latino, laughs at Moises.

ALICIA

No, es que corre tres cuabras, no bloques.

SUBTITLE

No, he runs three city blocks.

Alicia sees Enrique laughing and she laughs a little also. Moises ignores them and focuses on Ms. Peterson, who is just finishing writing on the whiteboard.

We move back into Ms. Peterson's point of view, so we can hear what she is saying.

MS. PETERSON

So how long does it take to run 20 blocks?

Some hands shoot up. Moises starts scribbling on his note pad, "1 bloque en 2 minutos".

JOHNNY

Eight!

MS. PETERSON

Remember to raise your hand first. No, not eight - Michelle?

MICHELLE

Eighteen?

Moises finishes his calculation and stares at the number "40" on his note pad. He tries remember how to say "40", mouthing the word silently. Enrique looks across at his answer and raises his hand.

ENRIQUE

Forty!

MS. PETERSON

Very good, Enrique, and how did you get that answer?

Moises doesn't realize Enrique has already said the answer. He pulls out a Spanish-English dictionary from his desk, and looks in the back where there are numbers.

ENRIQUE

Uh, I dunno.

MS. PETERSON

What were your steps?

ENRIQUE

... I forget.

Some kids laugh.

MS. PETERSON

OK, anyone else?

Moises finds forty in his dictionary. He practices the word again. He looks around and sees no one else raising their hands. He raises his hand, then puts it back down.

MS. PETERSON
 (surprised)
 Moises! Yes, how do we get the
 answer?

Moises looks round the class. They're all silently looking at him. This is one of the first times he's ever raised his hand. His words come out cracked with strain.

MOISES
 For ... tee!

Some kids laugh. Moises looks very embarrassed.

MS. PETERSON
 OK, settle down. Moises, that's
 very good. How did you get that
 answer?

Ms. Peterson goes over and looks at his work.

MS. PETERSON
 Good job. Tell us what you did.

Moises still has no idea what she said. He tries a different pronunciation.

MOISES
 For - tee?

Most of the class starts laughing, as Ms. Peterson tries to stop them.

MS. PETERSON
 OK, that's enough! Jose, do you
 want to lose recess?

Moises looks at the other kids and smiles, embarrassed.

4

INT. CLASSROOM - MORNING

4

Class has just finished for recess. Kids are walking out. Ms. Peterson is standing at her desk, filling in a form. Moises leans on her desk and swings his hips around - he loves being close to Ms. Peterson.

Alicia walks behind Ms. Peterson and mischievously holds her fingers like bunny ears just over Ms. Peterson's head. Moises looks at Alicia, shocked. Ms. Peterson turns her head. Alicia walks out, smiling.

Moises puts a drawing on Ms. Peterson's desk.

MS. PETERSON
Thank you, Moises.

Ms. Peterson glances at the drawing and continues writing, but she has a big smile. The drawing is of Ms. Peterson, with "Ms Peterson" written on the bottom.

MOISES
Please ... help.

He fumbles to pull out a handwritten note.

HANDWRITTEN NOTE:
Need test in Spanish

MS. PETERSON
Come, walk with me.

Ms. Peterson grabs a stack of binders. Moises looks ecstatic to be walking alone with Ms. Peterson. He runs to grab his practice test as he leaves.

5 INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

5

Ms. Peterson is walking fast with her stack of binders, and Moises is struggling to keep up, but very happy to be walking with her. Moises is carrying the practice test.

They talk to each other in their own languages, knowing that only part of what they say is understood.

MS. PETERSON
Don't worry too much about the
test. Do you understand?

Moises doesn't quite understand.

MOISES	SUBTITLE
Si, estoy muy preocupado sobre el examen. La directora dice que es muy importante.	Yes, I'm very worried about the test. The principal said it's very important.

MS. PETERSON	SUBTITLE
Just try your best. No ... uh .. importante.	It's not important.

MOISES	SUBTITLE
Si, es muy importante!	Yes, it's very important!

Ms. Peterson has been hurtling along the hallway, but she stops dead. She looks at Moises as if she is hearing him for the first time.

MS. PETERSON
You're right, Moises. It is
important.

Ms. Peterson looks at her watch. She scribbles a hall pass
for Moises.

MS. PETERSON
I need to go, I'm sorry.

She heads off quickly in a different direction from where she
had been going.

Moises walks away with his hall pass down the empty hallway,
despondent.

6 INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS 6

The school principal, MR. ROSA, Latino, 50's, is supervising
a MAN who is wheeling a cart-load of boxes with test papers
in them. Ms. Peterson walks up.

MS. PETERSON
Those are the tests?

Mr. Rosa speaks to the man in Spanish, and to Ms. Peterson in
English.

MR. ROSA
(in Spanish)
Just in here is fine.
(in English)
Yeah.

MS. PETERSON
They used to be in Spanish as well,
right?

MR. ROSA
Yeah, used to be.

MS. PETERSON
So can we translate it? Just the
math one. You know I have Moises,
he would really ace -

MR. ROSA
(in Spanish)
Yes, back there by the desk.
(in English)
I know, I know. You know we can't.
We're not even supposed to talk to
students in Spanish, technically.
(MORE)

MR. ROSA (cont'd)
 (in Spanish)
 OK, thanks.

The man who brought the cart in leaves. Ms. Peterson slumps a little.

MR. ROSA
 Look, I love Moises, but for today,
 focus on the other students ...
 like ...

MS. PETERSON
 Michelle.

MR. ROSA
 Michelle, right. She's -

MS. PETERSON
 Close to proficiency, I know.

Mr. Rosa points to a chart on the wall. He lowers his voice.

MR. ROSA
 Five percent proficient last year.
 We don't do better than that this
 year, I don't even know what
 happens. So yeah, make sure
 Michelle understands the
 directions.

Mr. Rosa closes the door on Ms. Peterson.

Ms. Peterson stands in the hallway. One of her binders drops on the floor. She leans against the wall for a minute. Then she picks up the binder somehow, without dropping the others, and hurries off.

7

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - MORNING

7

A BOY kicks the ball. Moises runs from second base. The ball is caught by an OUTFIELDER. Moises goes back to second base, tags up and makes it to third base. The PITCHER gets the ball and tags second base.

PITCHER
 You're out.

MOISES
 Yo regrese y toque la base.

SUTITLE
 I went back and tagged.

Everybody looks at Moises. He walks off, past the bench where the other kids who are playing kickball are sitting. GERARDO is sitting on a bench alone.

GERARDO	SUBTITLE
Creo que dijeron que no se vale tocar las base hoy.	They called no tagging today, I think.

Moises sits down on the same bench as Gerardo, but not very close to him. They both have leather shoes on and more formal clothes. Moises polishes a scuff on his shoe with his hand.

On the next bench is Enrique with his friends. They are all wearing more casual clothes with sneakers.

Moises pulls the crumpled practice test out of his pocket. He looks at it for a while, concentrating and mouthing words, then sets it aside.

Luis walks up. He sits down next to Moises.

LUIS	SUBTITLE
¿Ya terminastes de estudiar?	All done studying?

Moises looks at him, then looks down. He doesn't know what to say.

MOISES	SUBTITLE
(quietly) Yo ya lo se.	I know it already.

Luis doesn't notice Moises' lack of enthusiasm.

LUIS	SUBTITLE
Está bien.	Cool.

Enrique drops some food trash on the ground.

ENRIQUE
Hey Luis! Some trash here.

Moises stands up and clenches his fists. Some kids laugh.

MOISES	SUBTITLE
Le bantalo!	Pick it up!

ENRIQUE
You do it. Mojo.

Moises tries to get to Enrique. Luis holds him back.

LUIS	SUBTITLE
Está bien. Yo la recojo. También me llevo esta.	It's OK. Here, I'll take your trash too.

Luis takes trash from all the kids sitting at the bench. Moises looks on. Luis throws the trash in the bin right next to Moises.

MOISES
Yo lo quiero matar.

SUBTITLE
I want to kill him.

LUIS
Él es un p- es un estúpido.
Debería de estar estudiando
como tú para el examen. Te
apuesto a que no están bueno
como tú en las matemáticas.

SUBTITLE
He doesn't know sh - he's
stupid. He should be studying
for the test, I bet he's not
as good at math as you are.

Luis walks off. Moises looks after him, guilty.

GERARDO
Yo no lo voy a hacer.

SUBTITLE
I'm not going to do it.

MOISES
¿Qué cosa?

SUBTITLE
Do what?

GERARDO
El exámen.

SUBTITLE
The test.

MOISES
Tenemos que hacerlo.

SUBTITLE
We have to do it.

GERARDO
Yo no lo voy hacer y me voy
ir al parque.

SUBTITLE
I'm going to skip it and go
to the park.

MOISES
¿Te vas a escapar de la
escuela?

SUBTITLE
Leave school?

Sí.

GERARDO

SUBTITLE
Yeah.

MOISES
¿Has hecho esta antes?

SUBTITLE
Did you do that before?

GERARDO
Muchas veces. Es facil.

SUBTITLE
Lots of times. It's easy.

MOISES
¿Como te sales?

SUBTITLE
How do you get out?

GERARDO
Solo te tienes que meterte al
baño y irte cuando nadie te
este viendo.

GERARDO
You just wait in the bathroom
and then go out when no one's
looking.

Moises thinks about this.

GERARDO
Me voy a comprar un helado
con cinco dolares que tengo.

SUBTITLE
I'm going to get ice cream.
I've got five dollars.

Gerardo looks at Mr. Rosa, who is standing in the school yard, talking to a Latino kid.

<p>GERARDO El director dijo que seria malo que tomaramos el examen.</p>	<p>SUBTITLE Mr. Rosa said it was bad for the school if we take the test.</p>
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<p>MOISES ¿Quienes?</p>	<p>SUBTITLE Who?</p>
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<p>GERARDO Los que no saben ingles. Como tú y yo.</p>	<p>SUBTITLE English Language Learners. Like you and me.</p>
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<p>MOISES ¿Cuando dijo eso?</p>	<p>SUBTITLE When did he say that?</p>
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Mr. Rosa ruffles the hair of the Latino kid and sends him on his way.

<p>GERARDO El esta hablando con alguien en el telefono. Oye, tu no deberias hacer el examen, vente conmigo. Yo tengo suficiente dinero para dos helados.</p>	<p>SUBTITLE He was talking to someone on the phone. Hey, you should skip the test and come with me. I have enough for two ice creams.</p>
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Moises considers this for a long time.

<p>MOISES Bien.</p>	<p>SUBTITLE OK.</p>
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8 INT. SCHOOL STORAGE ROOM - MIDDAY

8

Ms. Peterson is squatting on the floor of a storage room, frantically rummaging around in a cardboard box. The room is a dusty, dark warehouse of abandoned school programs. She is surrounded by open boxes and colorful books which are in both English and Spanish. She coughs.

The senior janitor knocks on the open door to let Ms. Peterson know he is there.

JANITOR
You find what you're looking for?

MS. PETERSON
No. I was just looking for a test in Spanish for one of my kids.

She looks at the janitor. He says nothing.

MS. PETERSON

I know we used to have them. I thought they'd be with the old bilingual stuff.

The bell rings.

She starts quickly putting the books back in the boxes and sliding them back onto the shelves.

The Janitor helps her.

MS. PETERSON

Thanks.

They close up the last box and slide it back onto a shelf. The janitor closes the door, plunging the room back into darkness as the irritating clang of the bell continues.

9 EXT. DESERT - NIGHT (FLASH BACK)

9

The sound of the bell becomes a howling wind. Moises and his mother clamber over a fence. At the top Moises' mother is caught. She looks down to see barbed wire tangled in her pants.

MOTHER

Moises! Estoy atorada!

SUBTITLE

Moises! I'm stuck!

Moises pulls his mother over the fence and they both fall down. She looks despairing.

She touches Moises' face. It is alright. He's having the time of his life.

MOTHER

¿Estás bien?

SUBTITLE

Are you OK?

MOISES

¡Es divertido, solo como policias y ladrones!

SUBTITLE

It's fun! Just like cops and robbers!

He pulls her to her feet and they run off into the night.

A piece of her pants stays stuck on the barbed wire on top of the fence, fluttering in the wind.

10 INT. SCHOOL BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

10

Moises is at the sink, splashing water on his face.

Gerardo pokes his head around the door.

GERARDO

OK!

Moises just looks at him. He starts working the lever to let out the paper towel from the dispenser.

GERARDO	SUBTITLE
¡Vamos! ¡No hay moros en la costa!	Come on! The coast is clear!

Moises speaks through the paper towel as he dries his face.

MOISES	SUBTITLE
No puedo. Necesito hacer el exámen.	I can't. I've got to take the test.

GERARDO	SUBTITLE
¿Para qué? Si vas a fallar el examen.	Why? You're just going to fail.

MOISES	SUBTITLE
Yo no sé.	I don't know.

Gerardo pauses for another second before he takes off.

11 INT. CLASSROOM - AFTERNOON

11

The class is doing the test. Moises looks around nervously. It's very quiet, except for the scratching of pencils. A girl coughs in the back.

The first page of the test is all arithmetic questions, written out in numbers, so Moises is doing well. He answers the last question, to finish the first page. He takes a deep breath, and turns the page.

The next two pages are all problems in English words. He recognizes the word "two" as it turns into a number "2" and floats off the page. The rest turns into a sea of letters. He flips ahead and sees that the rest of the test is like this.

He looks at the walls - all stripped bare or covered up. He sees the man with the blocks half hidden behind some brown paper.

MAN WITH BLOCKS

Hey, Moises, what's the plan?

Alicia's desk has been moved much further away. He looks briefly at her. She smiles at him. Moises looks away.

ALICIA

Moises!

Moises doesn't hear her. Alicia goes back to her work.

He pulls out his dictionary half-heartedly.

Ms. Peterson comes up to him. She gently takes the dictionary from Moises' desk.

MS. PETERSON

I have to take this.

Moises has no reaction.

MS. PETERSON

You can ask me if you have any questions.

Moises nods. Ms. Peterson tries to figure out something else to say. She stares at the top of Moises' head for a long time.

A GIRL raises her hand. She goes to help her.

Moises just stares at his test, while all the other kids are bent over, working.

Enrique makes a "boo-hoo" face at Moises.

Moises doesn't register the insult. He hears a tap on the window. He looks up to see Luis, washing the windows. Luis makes a thumbs-up sign and has a huge grin.

He still stares at the window. The water running down the windows blurs Luis' image.