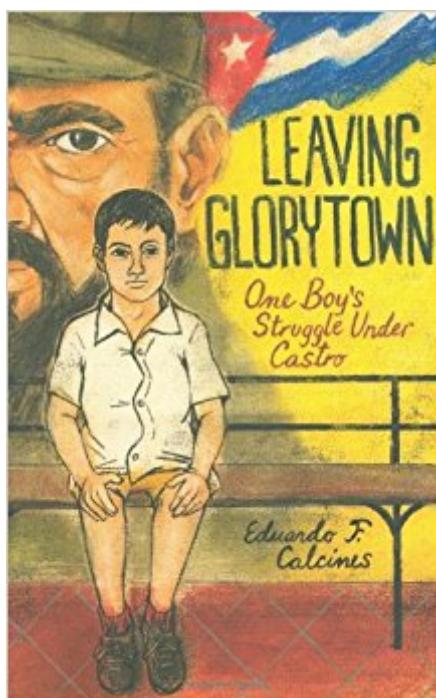


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# Leaving Glorytown: One Boy's Struggle Under Castro



## Synopsis

Eduardo F. Calcines was a child of Fidel Castro's Cuba; he was just three years old when Castro came to power in January 1959. After that, everything changed for his family and his country. When he was ten, his family applied for an exit visa to emigrate to America and he was ridiculed by his schoolmates and even his teachers for being a traitor to his country. But even worse, his father was sent to an agricultural reform camp to do hard labor as punishment for daring to want to leave Cuba. During the years to come, as he grew up in Glorytown, a neighborhood in the city of Cienfuegos, Eduardo hoped with all his might that their exit visa would be granted before he turned fifteen, the age at which he would be drafted into the army. In this absorbing memoir, by turns humorous and heartbreaking, Eduardo Calcines recounts his boyhood and chronicles the conditions that led him to wish above all else to leave behind his beloved extended family and his home for a chance at a better future.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 15 years

Grade Level: 5 - 10

## Customer Reviews

Calcines' grandmother told him that the world forgot the Cuban people after Fidel Castro took power, and for many Americans today that is still true. This is a rare look at Cuban life from 1959 to 1969, when Calcines' family managed to emigrate. The author was born into an exuberant extended family whose enjoyable lives changed abruptly

after the revolution. Food became scarce, jobs disappeared, and harsh restrictions were imposed. Eventually, Calcines' parents made the difficult choice to apply for a visa to America. From then on, life became a daily nightmare. Eduardo's father was sent to a prison work camp, and the family was bullied and humiliated and feared for their lives as they waited. Calcines' vibrant writing gives readers an intimate, front-porch view of his family. The wisely chosen vignettes are both humorous and stark, as in a story of five teens sharing a single stick of gum. Another episode about a teacher's brutality is immediate and vivid. Calcines' book will captivate readers and open a door to a subject seldom written about for teens. Grades 7-10. --Lynn Rutan

Calcines's spirited memoir captures the political tension, economic hardship, family stress, and personal anxiety of growing up during the early years of the Castro regime in Cuba. • Starred, School Library Journal "Engaging. • VOYA Calcines' vibrant writing gives readers an intimate, front-porch view of his family . . . will captivate readers and open a door to a subject seldom written about for teens. • Booklist Calcines is particularly good at emphasizing the importance of family and at describing how young Eduardo navigates the complications of having close friends who remain loyal to the Communist party. • Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books Calcines . . . nonetheless recalls being surrounded by loving adults who weathered adversity with a combination of strong character and unshakeable faith. • Kirkus Reviews Leaving Glorytown will leave readers with unforgettable lessons about the struggles that people experienced under Fidel Castro's leadership and the opportunities that come with freedom. • Rutgers University Project on Economics and Children Calcines "One of the biggest reasons why I like this book is because it is not only the story of the Cuban Revolution, but it's also the story of an average kid dealing with frustration of growing up. • Kota, 13

I originally checked this book out to read a "teaser" of it to my students, with intentions to return it to the library and leave it at that. My beginning Spanish students (middle school) love it. I ended up purchasing the book (1) to finish reading it to my students and (2) to keep in my personal library. It is a terrific autobiographical glimpse into Castro's Cuba and gives great insight to kids about life under a dictator. My students have been intrigued by Eduardo's life and struggles growing up in Communist Cuba; the book makes them think, and realize how fortunate THEY are to live in the

USA.

This is a wonderful story of desire for freedom, and it is definitely worth a read. Check it out, or you're a horrible person

I dont wait a lot for my purchase

This is a wonderful book explaining the struggle of a boy and his family, under a socialist communist country. A must read for people to understand the reality of socialism. Highly recommend for adults as well as middle school aged kids.

love it

I loved this book! Everyone should read this book!

Extremely pleased

I realize that almost everything about Cuba is politically charged and polarized. This has made it difficult for me to write a review of Leaving Glorytown. Not only is it a book about life in Cuba after the 1959 Revolution, but it is also a memoir. To question the ideas or themes of a memoir is to question the author's own personal story. My position as a U.S. citizen weighs a little heavier on my mind when I write about Cuba, particularly when I struggle with books written about the Cuban experience. I have my own thoughts and opinions about Cuba, and I realize that these are influenced by my own positionality. I can imagine how much of an author's being must go into the creation of a book, even more so perhaps for a memoir. I feel that all of this necessitates a responsible and respectful discussion of any title. I don't take book reviews lightly. I think carefully over how to share my thoughts and reactions. With that said, the following is a discussion of my thoughts on Leaving Glorytown. Calcines' strength in Leaving Glorytown is his portrayal of the close relationships he had with friends and family. By far, my favorite part of the book was Calcines' description of his relationship with his grandparents, especially his abuelo. The affection he shared with him was palpable. His descriptions of his relationships with his friends and cousins were also quite touching. Despite everything, they were always loyal--something that I hope any students reading would take note of. I also believe that Calcines does a good job of sharing important cultural

elements of Cuban life throughout his memoir. Readers will gain some understanding of Cuban traditions. Yet, I was saddened when so many of the things that he and his friends longed for were symbols of 1960s American culture, like ketchup, apple pie, blonde haired, blue-eyed girls, and Juicy Fruit gum. Leaving Glorytown was a difficult read for me in many ways. Typically, I enjoy memoirs, and I'd been looking forward to this one. However, it painted a difficult picture for me to accept. Calcines is quite critical of Fidel Castro, and not without reason. I don't think it is any secret, even to those who have supported Castro's Revolution, that there were serious issues in Cuba, including human rights violations. Like so many other revolutions throughout history, the reality didn't always live up to the ideals. Calines begins his book with a telling statement: "I was raised in two worlds--one a world of ideals, the other the real world. The world of ideals was full of Fidel Castro's lying propaganda and empty promises of a better tomorrow. The real world was even worse: a world of oppression, hunger, fear, poverty, and violence" (p. 1). For me, Calcines suggests a far too simplistic understanding of the Cuban situation: everything about Castro and communism is bad, while U.S. capitalism is the ultimate ideal to be attained. His portrayal is too black and white. I believe any legitimate discussion of the Cuban Revolution, must deal not only with what happened after 1959, but also the events preceding the revolution. There are important reasons for how and why the revolution took place, and why such a significant portion of the population was willing to support Castro. If we are going to teach our students about Castro's Cuba, then we must also be prepared to discuss conditions in Cuba under his predecessor, Fulgencio Batista. We must look at the realities that created the need and opportunity for Castro's political movement. Calcines' word choice is telling. He refers to supporters of Castro as zealots, thugs, minions, or evil people. Take the following description of a teacher: "SeÃƒÂ  ora Santana, like many Cubans, was of African descent. She wore a ponytail that pulled her hair tight against her skull, and her eyes gleamed with a fervor of the truly brainwashed. Her appearance was made even more terrifying by the electrical tape that held one arm of her glasses to the rest of the frame. Her beloved Communists couldn't even provide her with a decent pair of glasses. . .she'd abandoned reason and common sense" (p. 148). Now, I have no doubt that political propaganda was disseminated through the educational system. I'd argue this even happens in the United States. However, I have to question the depiction of Cuba's educational system as merely a vehicle for indoctrination. With some of the highest literacy rates and levels of educational attainment in the world, Cuba's system is well-known for its success. Calcines writes with a specific agenda, as I imagine most of us do. It's important to keep the author's purpose in mind when we share this book with our students, and perhaps, offer other alternative views. Then, with discussions that encourage critical thinking, our students can come to

their own conclusions. Calcines begins his book with the following statement: "I decided that it is time to let the world know not only what happened to my family, but also what happened--and continues to happen today--to all the people of Cuba, from whom Fidel Castro has taken everything, including hope itself" (p. 1). This is his story, yet, I must disagree with his last statement. A number of years ago, I lived in Cuba for a month. Based on that experience, I don't believe that Castro has taken hope itself from the Cuban people. In fact, I found the Cuban people to be full of hope, intelligence, creativity and a strong desire for survival.Others have written about Leaving Glorytown as well, so I hope you'll check out their reviews that I've linked to below.WOW Review: Reading Across CulturesThe Happy Nappy BooksellerCynsations Review and Interview with CalcinesWe have a free educator's guide for Leaving Glorytown available on our wordpress blog Vamos a Leer.

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