LEGAL ALIEN
by Pat Mora

BACKGROUND
Pat Mora was born on the border of El Paso, Texas and Mexico. Raised in a Mexican American household, she grew up speaking and reading both English and Spanish. Her poetry blends Hispanic culture into American society. This poem is from her first book of poetry. A legal alien is an immigrant who enters a country legally.

Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural, \( \text{A} \)

able to slip from “How’s life?”
to “Me’stan volviendo loca,” \( \text{B} \)

able to sit in a paneled office
drafting memos in smooth English,

1. \( \text{Me’stan . . . loca} \) (MEH STAHN VOHL VEE EHN DOH LOH KAH): Spanish for “They’re driving me crazy.”
able to order in fluent Spanish
at a Mexican restaurant,
American but hyphenated,
viewed by Anglos as perhaps exotic,
perhaps inferior, definitely different,
viewed by Mexicans as alien
(their eyes say, “You may speak
Spanish but you’re not like me”),
an American to Mexicans
a Mexican to Americans
a handy token
sliding back and forth
between the fringes of both worlds
by smiling
by masking the discomfort
of being pre-judged
Bi-laterally.²

**VOCABULARY**

**Word Study**

Fringes means “the outer edges.” What synonym (word with a similar meaning) for fringes could Mora have used here?

**READING FOCUS**

Re-read this poem to analyze details. What did you learn in the second reading that you didn’t learn in the first?

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2. Bi-laterally (by LAT UHR UHL LEE): by both sides. (Mora has added a hyphen to this word.)
Extranjera legal

by Pat Mora

Bi-lingüe, bi-cultural,
capaz de deslizarse de “How’s life?”
a “Me’stan volviendo loca,”
capaz de ocupar un despacho bien apuntado,
redactando memorandums en inglés liso,
capaz de ordenar la cena en español fluido
en restaurante mexicano,
americana pero con guión,
vista por los anglos como exótica,
quizás inferior, obviamente distinta,
vista por mexicanos como extranjera
(sus ojos dicen “Hablas español
pero no eres como yo”),
americana para mexicanos
mexicana para americanos
una ficha servible
pasando de un lado al otro
de los márgenes de dos mundos
sonriéndome
disfrazando la incomodidad
del pre-juicio
bi-lateralmente.