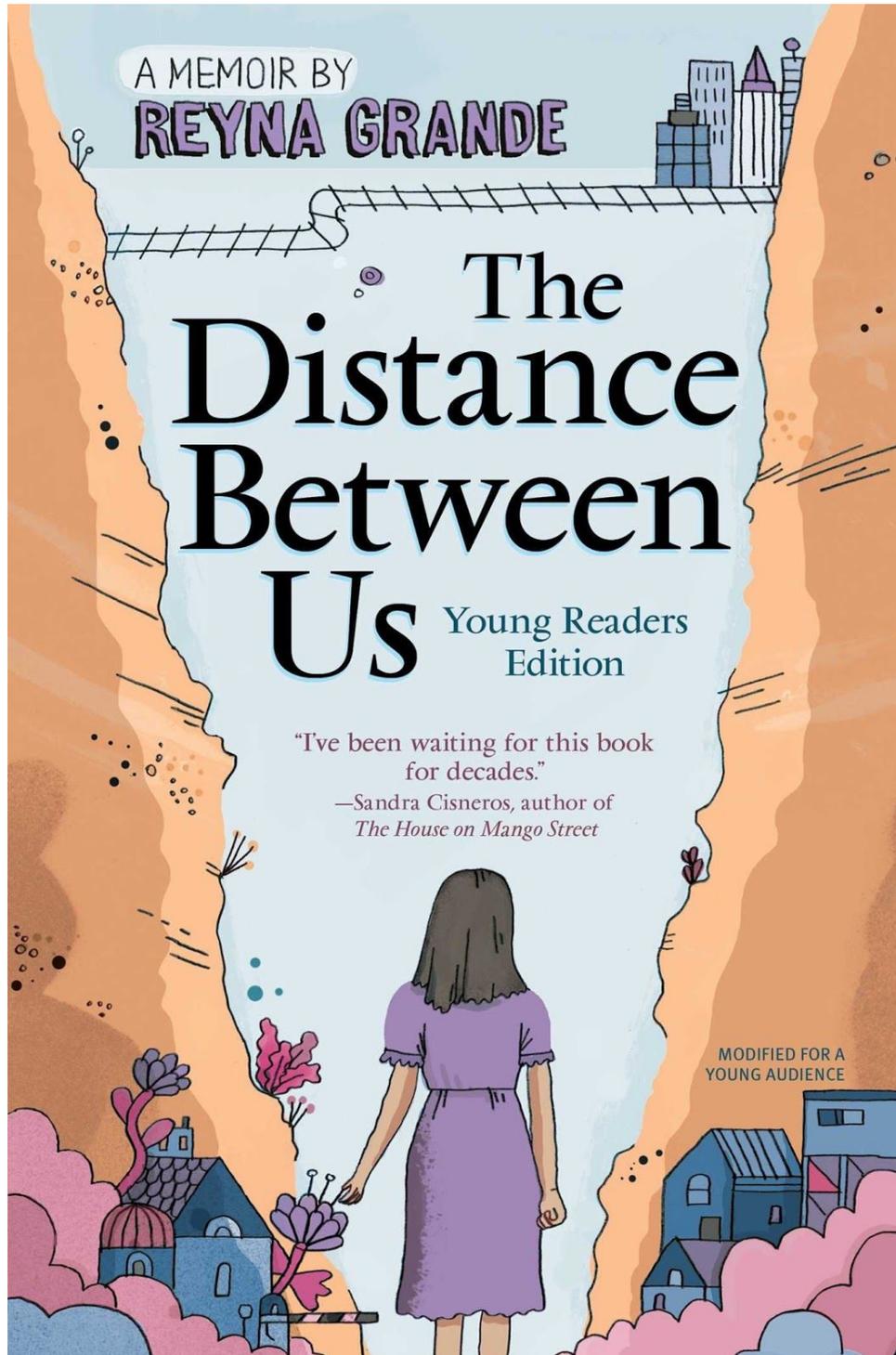


The Distance Between Us



<https://www.amazon.com/Distance-Between-Us-Young-Readers/dp/1481463713>

Reyna Grande



<https://reynagrande.com/>

Reyna Grande is an award-winning Chicana/Latina writer from Igualo, Guerrero Mexico. First attending Pasadena City College she went on to achieve her B.A. in Creative Writing and Film and Video at UC Santa Cruz. She finished her education at Antioch University where she holds an M.F.A in Creative Writing. Her writing tackles immigration, family separation, language trauma, the price of the American Dream, and her writing journey. Reyna Grande is a living embodiment of the American Dream. She lives in Davis, California where she loves to curl up with a good book.

Book Summary:

The Distance Between Us is Reyna Grande's memoir about her life before and after coming to the United States and becoming a full-fledged U.S. citizen. Her journey begins in her hometown of Iguala, Guerrero where she and her two siblings were born into immense poverty and hardship. When she was two years old, Grande's father left for El Otro Lado to make enough money so he can build his dream house for his family. Two years later Reyna Grande saw her mother leave for El Otro Lado to make money in the U.S. Grande and her two siblings were left in the care of their father's mother who abused and neglected them. While abroad in the U.S. their parents have another child but split up sometime after due to her father falling in love with another woman. Grande's mother returns to them and moves Reyna and her siblings to their other grandmother's house, a small shack by the train tracks. Her mother then abandons them to live in the city and their father returns to Mexico to bring them across the border. Once in Los Angeles, the three begin school and the process of becoming U.S. residents. Reyna's older sister and older brother graduate highschool but drop out of college to work, her younger siblings are living with their mother in Downtown LA. During Reyna's highschool years her father becomes an abusive alcoholic who forbids her from seeing her siblings or mother. His rage grows by the day until he ultimately forbids Reyna from attending UCI after highschool. Reyna works her way through Pasadena City College and into UC Santa Cruz where she became the first person in her family to achieve a degree. She begins reconciling her relationship with her father up until his death where she thanks him for being the driving force to achieve an education. The book ends with her beginning to write her memoir *The Distance Between Us*.

Significant Quotes:

“The Beams of the searchlight cut through the branches of the bushes. A beam of light fell onto my shoe. I yanked my foot back and wondered if the people in the helicopter had seen my foot. I tried to hold my breath, thinking that even the smallest sound could give us away. Please, God, don't let them see us. Please God, let us arrive safely in El Otro Lado. I want to live in that perfect place. I want to have a father. I want to have a family” (140).

This quote encapsulates why most immigrants choose to cross into the U.S. because a better life is ahead. For Reyna, El Otro Lado is the key to being with her family after a decade of not being together with her father. Crossing the border is one of the most exhausting and dangerous routes for a human being, let alone a child, thousands of children cross into the U.S. leaving their families behind. Grande paints how fleeting the moment can be in her writing and highlights how almost in an instance, an opportunity of a lifetime can fade away into oblivion.

“For the first time I felt like a normal family, a family with two parents, as I'd often dreamed. If anybody had looked at us, they would have said, “Look at that happy family.” Things weren't perfect--I didn't have my mother or my little sister, Papi was still a stranger to me in many ways and I still didn't know my way in this country and the

American culture--but for now I was grateful for the small things. The beach, the sun, and my father by my side” (151).

After crossing into the U.S. Reyna and her siblings turn their dream into a reality, as the man behind the glass finally becomes their father, and their family unit is whole, at least at a glance. Grande reminds the reader how blessed she and her siblings are to have a father who cares and to be in the land of opportunity. For now, they have escaped poverty, tapeworms, and loneliness as they embark on a new journey with the man who promised to return for them. Grande also points out that not everything is perfect the way she expected it to be but the small things in life can still bring joy and happiness in an unfair and unforgiving world.

“How could she just cut the ties that bound us to this place? To these friends of ours who weren’t able to escape this poverty like we had? I was so angry at her for quitting college and hurting her chances for a successful life. Now I realized we owed it to them, because they’d never be able to. I understood clearly now why Papi had said there were so many people who would die to have the opportunities we had, who would kill to get their hands on a green card which we were lucky enough to have gotten. Mago’s refusal to see that angered me more than anything else... How could I stop myself from feeling sad that Mago no longer cared about Iguala? Sad that she didn’t think of this place as special because it had once been our home? Her home was now the U.S. Unlike me, she had no accent when she spoke English. Now I knew why that was. Even in her speech she was trying to erase Mexico completely. I didn’t know if I ever could. Or would want to” (270)

The sad reality of immigration is that more often than not, children of immigrants or those who immigrated at a young age get pulled into the dominant culture of that country. Reyna realizes that her sister is trying to erase their turbulent past by becoming whitewashed. Mago goes to extreme lengths to separate herself from her hometown while Reyna realizes that the poverty they escaped to live a better life in the U.S. Mago’s refusal to acknowledge her humble beginnings is another sad reminder of a superficial society of American Culture. Many immigrants choose to assimilate into the dominant culture for fear of being rejected by their peers. By doing this Mago has lost her identity, her heritage, and sooner or later she will lose her traumatic experiences as a poor kid surviving in Iguala, a perspective the world desperately needs in order to understand immigrants.

Teaching the Book:

Creating a Contact Zone:

I would structure my lesson plan around sharing the immigrant experiences from multiple perspectives of different ethnic backgrounds. By providing a wide variety of immigration stories from various perspectives I hope to create a contact zone for other students, regarding their ethnicity, to relate and draw their own histories back to when their ancestors left their home in search of a better life. I will also provide a history lesson where I write down the various ethnic

groups on small pieces of paper and separate groups of students into different historical immigration movements. I will then give these groups the reasons why their immigration group migrated to the U.S. and have them create a story behind an immigrant of their ethnic group. As students share their stories I will begin pointing out the various similarities to their immigration stories so that I can teach these students no matter where they come from most immigrants end up in the U.S. for the same reason, opportunity.

*Why read *The Distance Between Us*?*

- Students reading from the perspective of an immigrant will provide a greater appreciation for how hard immigrants work.
- The text challenges students to empathize/relate with a character that may be closer to them in the real world i.e classmates, friends, peers, and every day encounters
- Reyna Grande drills in the significance of identity and heritage for students who may be straying too far from their own culture and background.

Text Complexity:

Quantitative:

Lexile: 925L-1185L (Grade 6-8)

The Reading range for this text would be best for grades 6-12 grade because the text deals with real problems that plague the world today and younger audiences may not understand the brevity of the situations Reyna Grande writes about. The text is very easy to read and addictive and would best suit students who are coming to understanding the nature of the world.

Dale-Chall Formula worksheet

Raw score 2.0099

Adjusted Score: (3.6365 + 2.0099)

Final Score: 5.6

New Dale-Chall Readability Index:

Grade level: Grades 5 - 6

Quantitative:

The novel resonates with **Exeter quality number 3:** a character who goes beyond typical experiences so that readers can use fictional experiences to learn and develop in their own life.

Reyna Grande has lived the whole novel from beginning to end and credits her experiences during the events of the novel as the foundation for who she is as an adult. Reyna Grande applies her trauma and life to her career and hopes that her perspective is read and studied by students who may need someone to relate to or a new perspective to experience.

The novel also heavily relates to **Exeter quality number 6:** Themes that inform truthfully about the wider world so as to allow readers to engage with difficult and challenging issues relating to immediate interests and global concerns. In our current political climate, the topic of immigration has been championed by both sides of the political spectrum. Immigration is talked

about and debated relentlessly by people across the country. This novel dives deep into the process and obstacles immigrants must endure in securing their right to live in the U.S. Students in schools are facing the same story Reyna Grande has lived upon her arrival to the U.S. and this novel provides an understanding and comfort to those going through the same process, as well as introducing a new perspective to students who struggle to understand immigration.

Adolescents in the Search for Meaning:

Reyna Grande's *The Distance Between Us* would best fit *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning* chapter 4: Books about Real--Life Experiences: Making Life Choices, Facing Violence or Abuse, and Living through Family and Relationship Issues. Within the novel, Reyna Grande must face some gut-wrenching life decisions regarding abuse and ambition. Throughout her journey, Grande comes to many forks in the road when deciding her future. She must choose between her father or her mother, to speak up in the face of abuse, and whether or not to continue her education. She faces many hardships throughout the novel, everyday decisions students may begin to face as they grow into their own the way Reyna Grande does throughout the book. Grande moves throughout her life with the same introspection students may go through throughout their lives as well. Her perspective is a beautiful reminder to students that they are not alone in this big, scary, everchanging world.