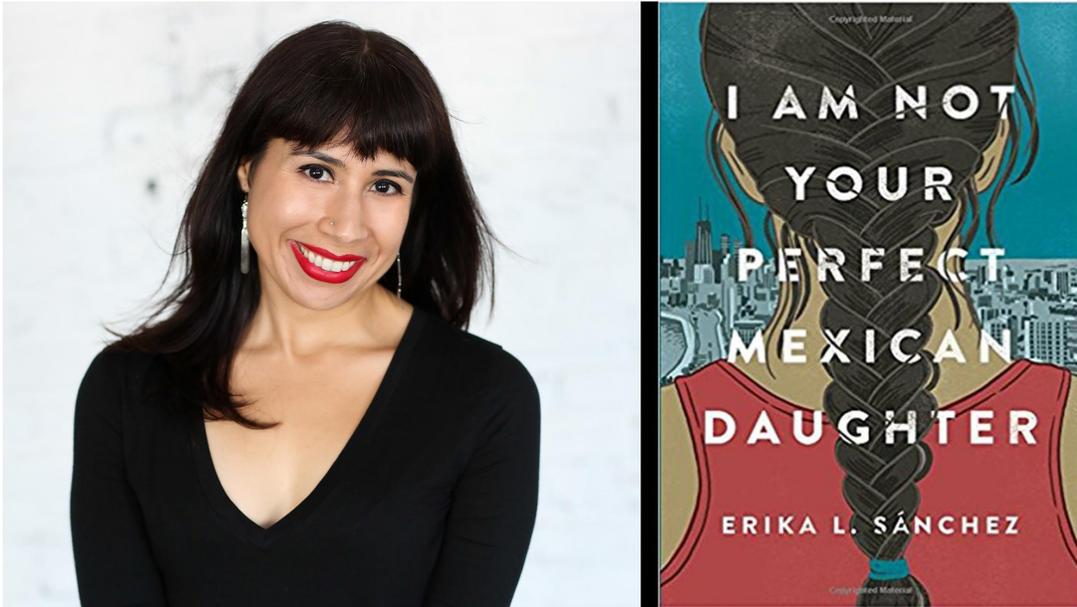


Ricky Covey

Book Talk: I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter



**Author Biography:**

Erika Sanchez was born and raised in Cicero, Illinois, to Mexican immigrant parents and was obsessed with books as a child. She attended the University of Illinois at Chicago and graduated as a Phi Beta Kappa and Magna Cum Laude member. After graduating, she received an opportunity. Sanchez later studied and wrote poetry in Spain. She later wrote her first book of poetry titled, *Lessons of Expulsion*, and then released her YA book *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, which became a National Book Award finalist in the young people's literature genre

**Summary:**

*I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika Sanchez follows the journey of uncovering secrets and lies while also discussing immigrant cultural identity. Teenager Julia Reyes despises her sister, Olga, as Olga is constantly seen as an example of what a perfect Mexican teenage daughter should be. After Olga's tragic death, Julia uncovers several secrets about her sister, which paints her to be not the person people once knew. She decides to keep her findings a secret. Julia begins to push away everyone around her and attempts suicide as a means to release the stress she is under. While seeking treatment, her parents send her to Mexico to spend time with her family. Although she is upset initially, she has opened her eyes to an opportunity to leave for a while and becomes excited. While in Mexico, Julia has a wonderful time with her family. She feels the love that is around her and feels at peace. She also experiences a run-in with the local narcos (drug lords), who are causing violence, which makes her aware of her reality. Julia later learns more about her Ama and Apa, and how while immigrating, Ama was raped by the coyote helping them, and Apa could not do anything about it. Julia is faced with a reality check that Olga is not Apa's child, and was kept a secret all these years. After returning to Chicago, Julia begins to repair all the relationships she has struggled with and maintains her secret that she knows the truth about her parents. After learning the last of her sister's secrets, which includes her sister's pregnancy, Julia starts to progress in therapy

and takes medication, as she prepares to leave for NYU on a scholarship. She is left with her parent's and friends' love as she embarks on her journey to uncertainty. She learns that her journey to get to know her sister's secrets helps her understand better her qualities.

**Quotes:**

1. "How can I leave them like this? How can I just live my life and leave them behind? What kind of person does that? Will I ever forgive myself?"

"We love you, Julia. We love you so much," Amá says, and presses some money into my hand. "Para si se te antoja algo," she says, in case I crave something when I get to New York. "Remember you can come back whenever you want." (Sanchez 338).

At the beginning of this story, all Julia has ever wanted was to be her own independent person. Yet, when she is finally able to, she starts to question why she felt like that, and started to see her parent's, never-ending love. This is shown when her mother gives her money to buy a snack when she lands. At the beginning of the story, she constantly criticized her daughters choices of food, and later accepts her for who she is, and not as a false narrative for who she is

2. "What do I do with this?" I say to myself aloud. "How do I bury this, too?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, how am I going to keep this secret? Why do I have to be the one living with this shit?"

"Please, don't tell your parents. Olga never wanted to hurt them."

"Why wouldn't I? And why should I listen to you?"

"Sometimes it's best not to tell the truth." (Sanchez 312)

After learning of Olga's affair and ultimate pregnancy with Dr. Castillo, Julia faces the consequences of keeping this secret. She knows that she cannot do this to herself anymore, but knows this would destroy any type of fond memory her parents have of Olga. This would kill them. Dr. Castillo urges Julia to not share the news, as the truth is sometimes more dangerous than good.

3. "Amá just shakes her head. "You know, Julia, maybe if you knew how to behave yourself, to keep your mouth shut, your sister would still be alive. Have you ever thought about that?" She finally says it. She says what her big, sad eyes were telling me all along." (Sanchez 162).

On the day of Olga's death, Ama was supposed to pick Olga up from work, but was forced to go pick up Julia from school after getting in trouble. This here shows that Ama blames Julia all along for Olga's death and if she would have just kept her giant mouth shut the day of Olga's death like she could have tonight, Olga would still be alive today. Coincidentally, Ama speaks to Julia in the tone that she resents most about her daughter's attitude

### **How to Teach This**

*I Am Not You Perfect Mexican Daughter* tackles many different issues. It tackles uncovering/keeping secrets and lies, the struggle of being a child to immigrants, and even takes a jab at suicide/mental health. Students can take away many aspects from this story. They can learn the harsh reality they live in this world, and learn they may be living in a fantasy. They learn to understand and appreciate their parents for what they have done, either as an immigrant child or not. They also learn what can happen when you withhold life-damaging secrets. For this book, I want students to understand what they are reading. After each chapter, I would assign a small quiz of small parts of the book as in, "Why did Julia attempt suicide?" or "What happened to Ama?" to make sure they are actually reading the book. I also want to do an activity about secrets and the damage it can do to oneself. I want to try a "letting it go" activity, where you write down a secret you are withholding that is killing you not to say out loud, and at the end, you take it to the paper shredder, and long gone is the weight of your shoulders. This helps students understand Julia's struggles and gives them another view of life

### **Adolescents and the Search For Meaning**

It is my belief that this book is related to chapter 6. This book is related to Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with decisions. Throughout the entirety of the book, Julia struggles to make her parents happy and live as her own person. She is constantly trying to save the image of her sister and cannot decide whether or not she should tell someone.

### **Text Complexity:**

The text falls under an ATOS level of 4.7 and a Lexile level of 730L. This novel is for students in the grades of 7-12. I would mainly say this would be a high school book. This comes up to the point that there's talk of infidelity, immigrant parents' expectations, and a scene involving suicide. Students would be interested in reading for not only its eye-grabbing title, but its premise and difference from everyday books. Kids from immigrant parents may relate even more than those who are not, but non-immigrant children can get a new perspective of life.