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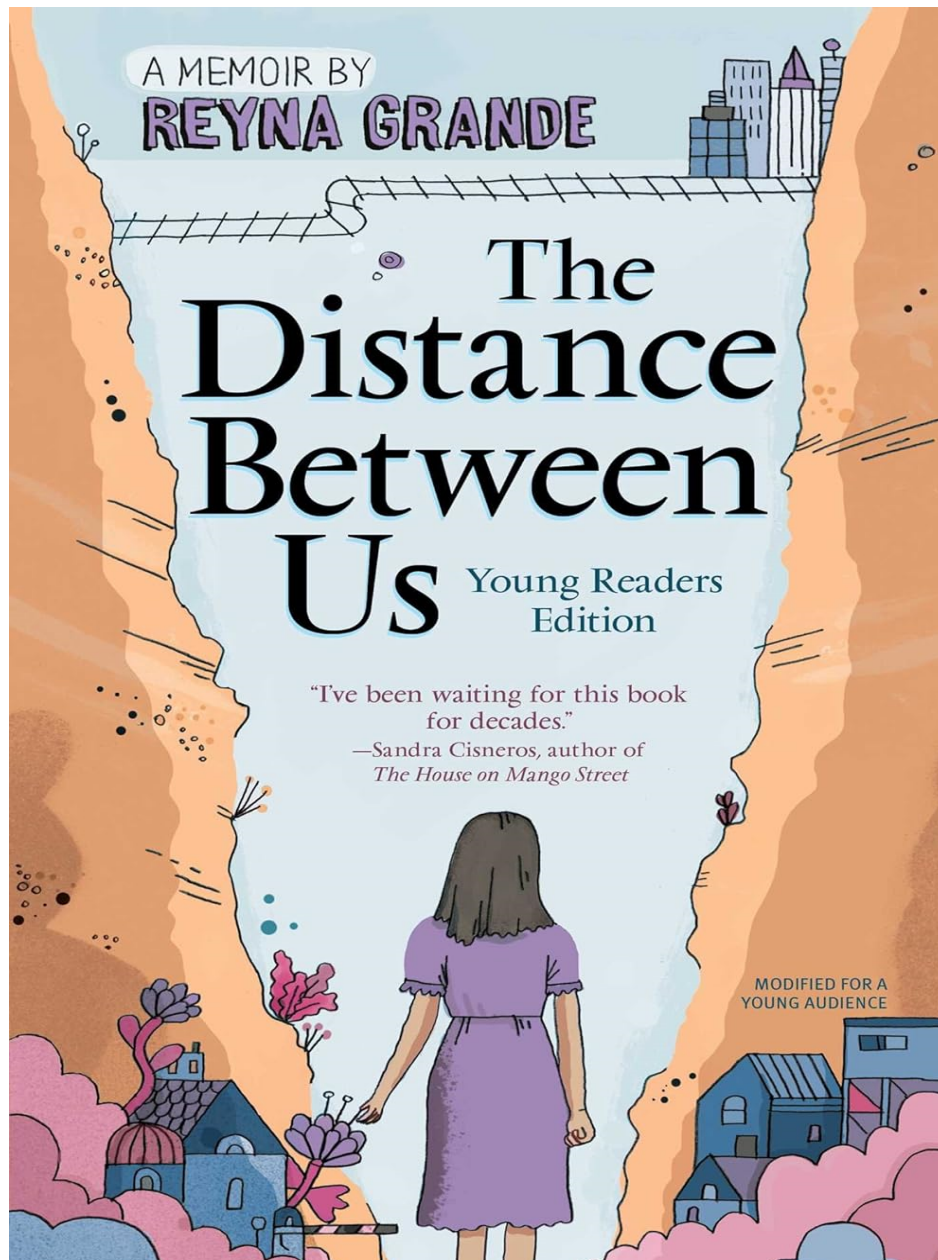
Professor Warner

English 112B

October 30th, 2023

The Distance Between Us

By Reyna Grande



About the author:

<https://reynagrande.com/bio/>

Reyna Grande is an author, award winner, and trailblazer. After coming to the United States at nine years old, Reyna became the first in her family to graduate from a University. Once she earned her B.A. in creative writing from UCSC, she later earned her M.F.A. from the University of Antioch. In 2012, Grande published her memoir *The Distance Between Us* which received outstanding recognition from both critics and readers. Grande's memoir describes her experience of immigration as a child, family trauma, and pursuit of a higher education. Since her memoir, she has gone on to publish numerous books that describe the pains and joys of the Latino experience such as *A Dream Called Home*, *Donde Somos Humanos*, and *Spare Parts*.

- Grande has received many awards such as the 2010 International Latino Book Award, California Latino Legislative Caucus 2021 Latino Spirit Awards, and the 2023 Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award, Poets & Writers.
- Grande is also an honored member of the Macondo Writer's Workshop founded by Sandra Cisneros, where she has also served as a faculty.
- Grande's work has also been featured in The New York Times, CNN, The Washington Post, etc!

Summary

Reyna Grande's memoir *The Distance Between Us*, entails the author's experience of childhood immigration, trauma, and desire for a higher education. Grande states that her memoir was written in hopes of allowing others to “[show] compassion, understanding, and love to all immigrants, especially child immigrants” (Grande). Grande begins her memoir with the scene of her and her siblings saying goodbye to their mother. At the age of four years old, Reyna's mother has decided to leave her children with their grandmother in Mexico as she goes to help her husband earn money in the United States. Grande's mother reassures her children that this situation will only be temporary and reminds her children that this decision will allow them to afford to build a house for the family once they return. However, due to unforeseen circumstances, the family is never able to reap the benefits of their parent's hard work. Instead, at just nine years old, Reyna and her siblings cross the border with their father to live in the United States. Although the children are excited to be reunited with their father after seven years and live in a country with far greater opportunities, this new environment creates many new challenges. Now having to reacquaint herself with her Father, Grande realizes that there is still a distance between her and her Father. As the story progresses, Grande's coming of age is both

motivated and challenged by her father. In this new country, Grande grapples with the distance she feels from her birth country, native language, and loved ones.

Quote 1

“I glanced at the new shoes, and part of me was desperate to wear them. They were new. They had been sent to us by our parents. They were from the U.S.! But then I thought about my parents. The fact that they didn't even know what shoe size I wore made me want to throw the shoes in the trash. We looked at each other. At that moment we all realized that the distance between us and our parents was tearing us apart” (Grande 50).

I chose this quote because a great aspect of this memoir is that it follows a child's perspective. Oftentimes people are only shown the images of child immigrants, but Reyna Grande's story gives these children a voice to relate to. In this scene, Grande and her siblings have just received a gift from their parents from the “otra lado” (the other side). As they open their gifts with much excitement, their joys are short-lived. This is because the gift's failure to hold personal details is a reminder to Grande and her siblings of the disconnect between them and their parents. The three siblings constantly fight the urge to resent their parents for leaving them behind, but this is proven to be a challenge for them as they endure the majority of their adolescence without either of their parents. Although a parent's sacrifice to cross the border for the benefit of their family is often heroized, Grande's perspective shows how this outlook is more often conflicting for the children left behind.

Quote 2

“He sighed and said, ‘Tonight will be our last time. If we don’t make it, you’re going back. Now go to sleep. You all need your strength tonight.’ But I couldn’t sleep. I kept thinking about these past five days and how quickly they’d passed. I kept thinking about Mami, Betty, my sweet grandmother—and I couldn’t help feeling torn about the situation” (Grande 138).

I chose this quote to illustrate the harsh realities of children from third-world countries. After returning to Mexico, Grande’s father decided to uproot his children and bring them to the United States in order for them to experience better opportunities. However, after two failed attempts to cross the border with his children, Grande’s father is unable to afford or risk another. Grande narrates from her nine-year-old perspective and shares how she understands the severity of their situation. She expresses her anxieties and concerns for the people she will be leaving behind. Bearing the weight of this situation at such a young age, Grande states how she feels “torn” (Grande 138). At just nine years old, Grande is faced with a pivotal decision. However, understanding that her country is no longer stable to support their life, she makes the decision to journey with her father and siblings. This scene serves as a reminder to readers who are U.S. citizens of the harsh realities many people of any age or condition make in order to live a better life.

Quote 3

“I wanted to tell him I’d be different, that I’d seen with my own eyes the poverty he’d helped us escape. I’d seen with my own eyes the reason he’d been such a tyrant about school. I wanted to tell him I’d do what Mago and Carlos hadn’t been able to do. I would go to UC Irvine and get my degree. I would be somebody he could be proud of. But he said to me ‘You can forget all about going to that university. You’re going to be a failure too, just like them, so don’t even bother.’ Then he walked away” (Grande 279).

I wanted to include this quote to illustrate a common obstacle in many Latino households, which is known as “machismo” (toxic masculinity). In his home, Grande’s father is the patriarch. He demands that all his children submit their lives to his expectations due to his gracious deed of bringing them to the United States. However, this demand causes great stress for each of his children. After his two eldest children decide not to continue or apply to college, Reyna’s father loses all hope in his children. On top of his disappointment, drinking causes Reyna’s father to become abusive. Although Reyna's biggest desire is to pursue higher education, her father’s experience with her siblings has caused him to withdraw his support (Grande 138). Though her father was once her greatest form of encouragement for school, he has now become an obstacle. After many immigrants arrive in the United States to escape poverty, the allure of making money quickly often derails them from the goal of a higher education. For Reyna’s siblings, this has been the case. Therefore this quote highlights the complexity of Grande’s relationship with her father and the harsh conditions she must endure in pursuit of her education.

Classroom Use

I would use this memoir in order to demonstrate to high school students the significance of inner monologues. After having students read Reyna Grande's memoir *The Distance Between Us*, I'd ask them to discuss what is significant about the inner monologue Grande includes in her story. I would ask them to locate the scenes where she uses her inner monologue and ask them what it provides to the story. After hearing their thoughts and opinions, I'd use the opportunity to stress the importance of inner monologue by arguing that it gives readers greater insight into a character's raw emotions and desires. In chapter four of *Adolescences In Search For Meaning: Taping The Powerful Resource of Story*, Dr. Warner suggests that both novels and memoirs that convey inner monologues are great ways to inspire students to write their own. Therefore after reading Grande's memoir alongside another book, perhaps *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, I'd allow students the opportunity to practice writing inner monologue. I would ask them to reflect on a memory or journal their lives for a week but ultimately record their inner monologues in order to write their own memoirs. My goal for this activity is to have students value the stories and perspectives that they each uniquely hold.

How it fits best in Chapters 4-8 of *Adolescences In Search For Meaning: Taping The*

Powerful Resource of Story

Chapter 4: Books about Real-Life Experiences

- In her memoir, Grande describes her experience of childhood trauma. From an early age, Grande struggles with abandonment. The inner monologue she uses conveys the complexities children face when dealing with difficult circumstances.

Therefore like Grande, many teens can relate to the pains of childhood with trauma.

- In her story, Grande describes her experience of an abusive father. This brutal reality is a common misfortune for many teens endure.
- Grande shares her anxieties about her future self in regard to school. This a common anxiety for teens.

Chapter 5: *Books about Facing Death and Loss*

- Once Grande arrives in the United States, she struggles with loss after missing the family left behind and her birth home. This a relative experience for many teens whose families uproot in search of better opportunities.
- Grande faces the reality of death within her unsafe community growing up. Due to gang violence, murders are common in this high schooler's reality. The same can be said for many teens.

Chapter 6: *Books About Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles With Decisions*

- As a young child, Grande struggles with her belief that she is loved by both her parents. As in her story, many teens do not experience traditional loving homes.
- Grande faces discrimination in school as she is not given equal opportunity because she is an ESL student. This is a reality for many teens, especially in California.
- Grande struggles with the expectations and limitations of her father. This is a dynamic many young adults struggle with.

Chapter 7: *Books About Courage and Survival*

- Grande goes to cross the border at just nine years old with her father and siblings despite being afraid. Although this scene reaches a limited audience, it conveys the courage of Grande as a child.
- As Grande begins to mature, she begins to make decisions for herself without her father's concern. This leads her to move out for a while and decide for herself to continue on with her education. The struggle for independence is a common coming-of-age story for teens that requires courage.

Quantitative

Lexile: Age: 10-14 years old

AR: ATOS Book Level 5.0, Interest level Middle Grades Plus (MG+ 6 and up), AR Points 11.0

Dalle-Chall: 6-8th grade

I would recommend this book for a 7th grade to Freshmen grade level.

Qualitative

1. Structure

- a. First-person perspective.
- b. The story is told in a linear progression as the main character retells her past.
- c. The story is told in a sequential order the author's life up until her arrival at the University.
- d. The story emphasizes the emotions of the author which aids readers to comprehend her perspective.

2. Language Conventions and Clarity

- a. Word choice is very simple in retailing the author's story.

- b. Spanish is used, however, causing some readers to rely on a dictionary for comprehension.
- c. Through the inner monologue of the author, the readers can experience/relate to the main character's emotions described in the story.

3. Knowledge and Demands

- a. As mentioned, certain scenes use Spanish which requires non-speakers to rely on a translator.

4. Levels of Meaning

- a. The first level of meaning
 - I. Immigrants experience anxiety from their status as illegal citizens.
 - II. Toxic Patriarchy is abusive to all those in its vicinity.
 - III. Education is a hope for many minorities' chance of success.
- b. The Second Level of Meaning
 - I. Immigrants are resilient in the face of adversity.
 - II. Family is an important factor in teens' lives.
 - III. Education can be both a hope and a strain for those with greater obstacles.