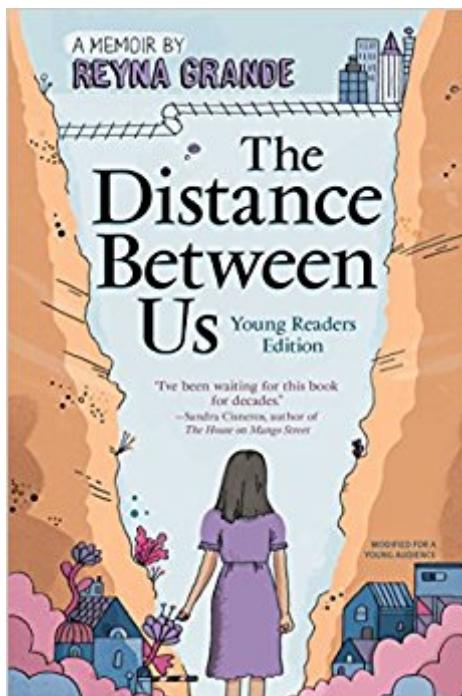


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The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition



Synopsis

Award-winning author Reyna Grande shares her personal experience of crossing borders and cultures in this middle grade adaptation of her memoir, *The Distance Between Us*—“an important account of the many ways immigration impacts children” (Booklist, starred review). When her parents make the dangerous and illegal trek across the Mexican border in pursuit of the American dream, Reyna and her siblings are forced to live with their stern grandmother, as they wait for their parents to build the foundation of a new life. But when things don’t go quite as planned, Reyna finds herself preparing for her own journey to “El Otro Lado” to live with the man who has haunted her imagination for years: her long-absent father. Both funny and heartbreakingly honest, *The Distance Between Us* sheds light on the immigrant experience beautifully capturing the struggle that Reyna and her siblings endured while trying to assimilate to a different culture, language, and family life in *El Otro Lado* (The Other Side).

Book Information

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Age Range: 10 - 14 years

Grade Level: 5 - 9

Customer Reviews

Gr 6-9—In this adaptation of her memoir, award-winning author Grande chronicles her life, from living in Guerrero, Mexico, as a child to attending college in the United States. Themes of poverty, survival, undocumented immigration, health concerns, and domestic violence are juxtaposed against her deep yearning to experience her parents' unconditional love and support.

and a hunger to excel academically. Throughout the book, she describes how she struggled to hold family relationships and her own identity together under the relentless strains of an immigrant experience. Strong sibling bonds provided support as Grande doggedly worked toward academic success and her dream of college and a place to find peace. This honest first-person account may be a mirror for many readers, allowing them to see reflections of their own strengths, possibilities, and hopes. For others, it offers a humanizing window into the Mexican American experience.

VERDICT An important addition to any library serving middle grade students, given its compelling narrative and the gap it fills in the available memoir subgenre for this level. —Ruth Quiroa, National Louis University, IL --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Reyna Grande is an award-winning novelist and memoirist. She has received an American Book Award, the El Premio Aztlán Literary Award, and the Latino Book Award. Her second novel, *Dancing with Butterflies*, received critical acclaim. In 2012, she was a finalist for the prestigious National Book Critics Circle Awards for her memoir *The Distance Between Us*. Her works have been published internationally in countries such as Norway and South Korea.

An absolutely wonderful book. I'm so glad there is now a YA version.

We were recommended this from a Portland, Oregon area library. When the days get shorter my husband and I and our two youngest children (9 and 13) sit after dinner and read aloud. This year we started with this book. Over and over they would say, "Read another chapter." I caught myself continually having to fan my face while reading as not to cry in sadness or joy. When Reyna would have a victory I felt like I was right there with her. Thank you so much for this book.

Echoes of Cinderella reverberate throughout Reyna Grande's forceful and captivating memoir of a family torn apart by internal and external stressors, centered in a years-long separation across the U.S.-Mexico border. *The Distance Between Us* thrums with novelistic tension and detail, offering chiseled portraits of individuals and rendering the settings they come from in vivid form. As the story lends breath and heartbeat to a particular Mexican girl and her struggle to overcome unimaginable obstacles related to poverty, migration, and family turmoil, it also humanizes the faceless, nameless stream of undocumented migrants that we hear so much about in the news. Due to the physical and cultural distances that develop between members of the family, Reyna spends much of her childhood feeling like an orphan. The memoir begins as her mother,

Juana, leaves Reyna and her two siblings under the care of Evila, the children’s paternal grandmother. Motivated by the promise of steady work and higher wages, Reyna’s father has already left Mexico for El Otro Lado, and this happened so long ago that four-year-old Reyna must rely on a framed photo to remember what he looks like. Later, Juana decides she must migrate, too, and although she vows to return within a year, the separation stretches out much longer, stranding her children’s father, Reyna, Mago, and Carlos in a bleak, loveless existence. Even as the three siblings tend to chores and subsist on meager rations, Abuelita Evila lavishes treats and special privileges on Iida, another grandchild living under her roof. Although some of Iida’s spoils come from the money that Juana and her husband send for their children’s necessities, the couple remains unaware of these abuses. Each time they call to speak with their kids, Evila hovers nearby to make sure they don’t disclose anything negative. When Juana returns from her two-and-a-half year absence, she is almost unrecognizable to Reyna. Her hair is dyed bright red, her clothes are much fancier than anything she used to wear, and there is a new baby in her arms. Worse yet, she demonstrates a chilling degree of detachment toward her children. Before long, Juana acquires a boyfriend and foists all four kids off on their other abuelita, a far poorer, but kinder woman whose house is a one-room shack constructed of bamboo sticks. A river nearby subjects the house to serious flooding. When the children’s father finally returns to Mexico for a visit, eight years have passed. He reluctantly agrees to take Reyna and her two older siblings back to El Otro Lado. This will involve a bus trip of two thousand miles from the Mexican state of Guerrero to Tijuana, where they will engage the services of a coyote. But at a critical moment before they leave, Reyna catches a glimpse of Juana as she used to be and, aching to believe that her mother loves her, she is tempted to stay behind. Then it dawns on Reyna that her sister, Mago, is the true maternal figure in her life, the one who has offered sacrificial love and protection at every turn, and if Mago is fleeing Mexico, Reyna will, too. In many aspects, Reyna’s story is reminiscent of the mother-son alienation described in Enrique’s Journey, by Sonia Nazario, reviewed here. Like Enrique’s odyssey, Reyna’s story reveals conditions of unrelenting poverty, and shows the personal drive and courage of individuals who dare to leave behind all that is familiar in order to make a better life. The book also shows the steep costs, both literal and metaphoric, of migration in general and chain migration in particular. (Chain migration refers to the practice of one or more family members setting out to establish a home and/or save up money, usually in preparation for the rest of the family to join them.) We see this especially in how

separations intended to be brief often last much longer than planned and lead to deep relational breaches. For those of us privileged with predictable lives of plenty, it is all too easy to pronounce judgment on parents who take such drastic steps, yet stories like *The Distance Between Us* illuminate the complex dilemmas faced by immigrant families caught in extreme poverty with no apparent recourse in their countries of origin. Although this memoir offers an eye-opening opportunity to grasp the bigger picture, most young readers will home in on Reyna Áf Ács personal journey, as she crosses figurative and literal landscapes pocked with obstacles. Once she and her family take the plunge toward the better life they imagine is waiting for them in *El Otro Lado*, readers will clutch at their hearts, rooting for Reyna with every page turn. And their hopes will be rewarded.

For full review and author interview, please search "5 Girls Book Reviews" in a search engine and/or Facebook
REVIEW BY: Arianna, 13 years, 11 months
MAY CONTAIN SPOILER: I absolutely loved this story! This true story filled me with anger, laughter, sadness, and determination. It tells the story of a young girl and her siblings living in Mexico and immigrating to the U.S.A. They experience things no one should even have to. Yet, they survive and become stronger. My favorite person is Reyna Grande because this book tells the story of a naive child growing up to be a capable and strong woman.

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