

## REYNA GRANDE

Born on September 7th 1975, in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico. She is an award-winning novelist and memoirist, and the author of the bestselling memoir, *The Distance Between Us*. The sequel to this novel is called *A Dream Called Home*, and will be released on October 2, 2018. Her other works include the novels, *Across a Hundred Mountains*, and *Dancing with Butterflies*.

*The Distance Between Us* is also available as a young readers edition from Simon & Schuster's Children's Division–Aladdin. This is the version I have read.



## SUMMARY

Since this a memoir, the novel is entirely in Reyna's perspective, thoughts, and feelings. The story is centered on the immigrant experience, and gives us a glimpse of the struggles faced by the children left behind. Reyna, the young protagonist, is born in Mexico and raised by her grandparents after her parents leave to find work in the U.S. Grande describes her difficult childhood, after being abandoned by both her parents. Her older sister Mago takes on a maternal role for her two younger siblings, Carlos and Reyna. When reyna is about 10 years old, she enters the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant to live with her father. She quickly realizes that life in America isn't what she dreamed it would be. For eight years she clung to a photograph of

her father, being it was the only father she ever knew. Upon living with him, she realizes that the man she idealized did not exist. Natalio, which is rarely called by name in the novel, has big dreams for his children, those dreams are what gets them across the border, after two failed attempts. Nonetheless, his alcoholism and rage undermine all his hard work and good intentions. Reyna finds refuge from a violent home in books and writing, inspired by Chicano@ and Latin@ literature. After much difficulty, Reyna breaks away from her stern father, and goes on to become the first person in her family to obtain a higher education.

**TEXT COMPLEXITY**

The version I’ve read was modified for younger audiences, aged 10-14.

ATOS® Reading Level: 5.4 (approximately 5th grade)

Lexile Level: 780L

In terms of sentence structure and the vocabulary used in the book, it is not complex or hard to understand. It's a very easy read, easy to follow, contains some images, and each chapter is only about 4 pages long. However, the theme is very universal, therefore the book is appropriate for all audiences.

<b>QUOTES</b>	<b>ANALYSIS/SIGNIFICANCE</b>
<p>Mago touched my belly button and said something my mother had never said. She said my umbilical cord was like a ribbon connected me to Mami. she said “It doesn't matter that there's a distance between us now. That cord is there forever.”I touched my belly, and I thought about what my sister had said. I had Papi’s photo to keep me connected to him. I had no photo of my mother, but now my sister had given me something to remember her by. “We still have a mother and a father,” Mago said. We aren't orphans, Nena. Just because they aren't with us doesn't mean we don't have parents anymore.” (pg.14)</p>	<p>The quote depicts Grande’s successful attempt of encapsulating Mago’s maternal side, Mago is staying true to the promise she made her mother, that she would be her siblings “Little mother”. Mago comforts her sister with words she's probably already told herself. This excerpt of the book highlights their bond. It also captures the essence of the book for it portrays the feelings associated with being a child of immigrants. Reyna feels like “the orphan” that everyone has began calling her. Her feelings of abandonment are often illustrated within the text.</p>

I was humming the song as we walked through the gate, and then I stopped when I saw the woman standing on the patio holding a little girl her arms. The woman was wearing a lilac dress and golden high-heeled sandals that shone under the sun. I couldn't see her face very well because she had big sunglasses on. Her hair was curly and dyed a bright red. She looked like a TV star. The little girl in her arms was dressed in pink ruffles and lace. She was a chubby baby, her cheeks so puffy that it seemed as if her mouth were stuffed with cotton candy. Id never seen such a healthy looking baby before. "Well, aren't you going to say hello to your mother?" the woman asked with a smile. We stayed by the gate holding onto her buckets. Don't just stand there Abuela Evila said. "Go get your things ready." Tia Emperatriz walked over to us, took my buckets, and whispered, "Go give your mother a hug." We still didn't move from the gate. Mami was the one who came to us. I clenched Mago's dress and hid behind her. Mommy didn't look like the mother I tried so hard to not forget the past two and a half years. "Look at you kids. You've grown so much!" when she took off her sunglasses I saw her eyes, I could no longer deny my mother. Pg 61-62 "Come here, Reyna" Mami said. I went to her, and I let her hug me with one arm. I hesitantly wrap my arms around her waist, feeling as if this were a dream and she'd disappear any minute. (Pg. 63)

"That's the only way your father knows how to be," Mila said to us later that evening. "He was abused by his parents,

I chose this excerpt of the book because it's a pivotal moment. The children are seeing their mother for the first time in two and a half years. They are overwhelmed by emotions, surprised, happy and a little angry because their mother had promised to return within the year. Juana, Reyna's mother, which is also seldom called by name, looks different from what Reyna recollected. She is referred to as "the woman" to highlight how distant she has become to Reyna. Reyna's uncomfortable embrace with her mother illustrates this untrusting relationship.

This excerpt encapsulates the abuse she underwent under her alcoholic rage-fueled father. This section also highlights her

so that's all he knows.”

We didn't tell Mila we were sick and tired of her justifying Papi's behavior with the same lame excuses.

We understood what Papi must have gone through, because we knew firsthand what our grandparents were like. But that didn't make us feel better. If Papi knew how it felt to be abused by his parents, then shouldn't he understand how we felt? Shouldn't he try to be a better father?

“I came back for you, didn't I? He would say to us sometimes when we spoke up.

Then we'd shut up and lower our heads, and we'd continue to take his beatings.

Even the day when he punched me in the nose so hard that it broke.

father's chauvinistic views. As Mila is described as rather submissive, her father is the only one with a voice in their household. It also shows Reyna's willingness to connect with her father, for she attempts to empathize with him despite his aggressions.

### **Why teach this book to teens?**

The novel employs some of the Exeter qualities that make up good Young Adult literature. For one, it has an exciting plot, full of tension, and is brought about through Grande's narrations of her and her siblings endeavors through poverty and constant rejection, as well as crossing the border illegally, and surviving violence.

The book also contains characters who go beyond typical experiences, not everyone has experienced crossing the Mexican-American border illegally, like Reyna, Mago and Carlos, nor had they have to take on maternal roles at age 8, like Mago.

The central theme of the novel informs truthfully about the wider world

This book deals with poverty, abandonment, immigration, abuse, so many experiences not often found within the literary canon.

### **Why should everyone read this?**

At a time when immigration politics are at a boiling point in America, Reyna Grande is an important public voice for Mexican Americans and immigrants of every origin. *The Distance Between Us* has the power to change minds and hearts.

It is also vital to understand the essence of the immigrant experience.