***I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika. L. Sanchez**

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Born in 1984 in Cicero, Illinois, Sanchez is an American Poet. Her parents are Mexican immigrants. She went to the University of Illinois, Chicago. She went to Madrid after college to teach English and also to pursue poetry. *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* is her first young adult novel and it was published in 2017.

This young adult novel set in contemporary Chicago, follows the life of Julia Reyes, a 16 year old girl, who is a daughter of Mexican immigrants and sister of Olga. She calls her parents ama and apa. Olga dies in the beginning of the story and we see how Julia struggles with her parents' idealization of her dead sister while they are, especially her mom, hard on her and very judgmental about how different, in a bad way, she is from her sister. Her sister was an apparently very well behaved 22 year old girl who went to college and during her free time, helped her mother cleaning houses and spent time at home with her parents, mostly. Julia is different; she is opinionated, questions the world, loud, and wants to go to NYC to become a writer. Throughout the novel, Julia’s mother keeps telling Julia how she is so different from her sister, implying her sister was better than Julia. Julia finds items that suggest that her sister had a secret life while Julia is going through depression from her sister’s death and from her parents not being supportive. Julia’s journey has the themes of love, disappointment, family issues, friendship, dreams, and wonders of a 16 year old girl.

**“Saint Olga, the perfect Mexican daughter. Sometimes I wanted to scream at her until something switched on in her brain. But the only time I ever asked her why she didn’t move out or go to a real college, she told me to leave her alone in a voice so weak and brittle, I never wanted to ask her again. Now I’ll never know what Olga would have become. Maybe she would have surprised us all” (Sanchez 3)**

Throughout the novel, Julia tells the reader how Olga was the perfect daughter for her parents. Before she died, Olga went to college, yet did not seem close to graduating after four years of attendance. She worked as a receptionist, and she spent her free time going to church with her mom, helping her cleaning houses, and being in the house with her parents. She seemed to be the perfect daughter. This frustrated Julia, who had many problems in school and who did not have the same behavior as her sister. She wanted to leave home to go to college. This quote is interesting because one can see how, even with Olga dead, Julia is upset by her parents’ expectation that she should be the same as her sister. It is important to notice that in this quote Julia asks her sister, while she is alive, why she didn't leave her parents’ house. Her sister was reluctant to have a conversation with Julia, but only told her to “leave her alone.” Julia wonders what could have happened with Olga if she were still alive; she hopes her sister would move out of her parents’ house and be independent. This happens in the beginning of the novel, when Julia has not yet found out what was actually going on with her sister.

**“‘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)**

These words are said by Julia’s mother. Olga was hit by a bus while crossing the street. She was texting and did not see the bus coming so she died immediately. Olga took the bus that day only because her mother was busy at school when she got called by the school principal because of Julia’s bad behavior. Julia throughout the novel wonders this as well, if she did not misbehave that day, would her sister still be alive? She suspects that her mother, in a way, blames her for Olga’s death, and listening to her mother saying these words intensifies the depression that Julia is already suffering since it confirms her suspicion. These words, to me, make things worse and finally bring Julia to the point of trying to kill herself. Julia is carrying guilt and sadness because of her sister’s death and also because she feels guilty about not being what her parents want. They do not encourage her dream of becoming a writer, they do not see that it could bring her happiness. To them, any office job will be better than what they do because their jobs are hard to do physically and they think that having AC in an office is enough for one to be happy, but not for Julia, since she wants to be a writer in NYC.

**“‘Here.’ I hand Apa his drawing of Ama in her long dress in front of the fountain. ‘It’s beautiful, and you should have it,’ I tell him. ‘I wish you’d draw again, Apa. Maybe you can draw a picture of me sometime?’ I smile and wipe my face with the back of my hand. Apa closes his eyes and nods” (338)**

After Julia’s suicide attempt, her parents decide to send her to Mexico to her grandmother’s house. She does not want to go but she has no choice. Once she gets there, she realizes it was a good decision since she is having fun and seeing her family from Mexico is doing her good. She even finds a guy she likes and cousins who she likes to spend time with. In Mexico, she finds out that her father, before leaving for the US, was the artist of the town. He is an excellent drawer, and her grandmother gives her a drawing that her father made of her mother. This is when Julia realizes that her father also had a dream, but he quit this dream in order to support his family, including her. When she is accepted by the college in NYC and she is at the airport saying goodbye to her parents, Julia gives the drawing to her father and asks him to draw her someday and to return to drawing. This quote is very important because it shows, not only that Julia is at peace with her parents now, but also that she admires her father and has a different impression of him now. Julia also gains a new appreciation for her mother, after she finds out that her mother was raped when they were crossing the border from Mexico to the US, a trip made to provide a better life for her children.

**Why would you use this book in a classroom?**

* Because teens can feel pressure from what their parents want them to be. Maybe parents want their children to be a way they are not, or they want them to follow a career path they do not want to follow. I would present this book as an option to feel that one can follow the path one wants, as Julia does.
* Because teens can be depressed or they can know someone who is going through depression. I would present this book as an option to feel that one can be listened to.
* Because, like Julia, teens could have gone through a meaningful loss of a family member and they may feel better after reading this novel. I would present this book as a choice for those in mourning, who miss a relative who has recently died, and I would tell my students that, like Julia, there is always hope that things will be okay and that one can go back to feeling happy.

**Which category of books might this book fit?**

This book fits into the category of chapter 5 of *Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story*, which is “Books about Facing Death and Loss.” The reason is that Julia’s loss of her sister is the main topic around the plot. Because Olga dies, Julia discovers a whole new world that goes from depression to a better understanding of who her parents are and who her sister was.

**Text Complexity**

* **Quantitative**

Lexile: Age: N/A, 1080-1360L

AR: Book Level 4.7, AR points: 12.0, Interest level: UG 9-12

Readability: 9-12 graders, ages 14-18

Dale-Chall: 7.0-9.9

I would recommend this book to 9-12th grade students.

* **Qualitative**

The passages in this novel are easy to comprehend and have no conflict in terms of vocabulary nor ideas. I believe that this novel suits 9th to 12th graders; yet, 8th graders with an adequate level of maturity can also enjoy this book since Sanchez has elements of comedy and makes the book entertaining from beginning to end.