

INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



A NEW
YORK TIMES
BESTSELLER —
**LIVE ON
STAGE!**

A LOVE LETTER TO YOUNG LATINAS

I AM NOT YOUR PERFECT MEXICAN DAUGHTER

Illustration by Kyle Malone

PLEASE RETURN TO PATRON SERVICES



INSIDE OUT

Use of study guide materials for publication requires permission from the Marketing Department of the Denver Center for the Performing Arts.

Contributing Writer Hannah Herrera Greenspan
Education Contributor David Saphier

DENVERCENTER.ORG
Administration 303.893.4000
Box Office 303.893.4100

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter

Based on the Novel by **Erika L. Sánchez**
Adapted by **Isaac Gómez**
Directed by **Laura Alcalá Baker**

SEP 27 – NOV 3
KILSTROM THEATRE

SPOTLIGHT SPONSORS



STUDENT MATINEE SEASON SPONSOR



SEASON SPONSORS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| SYNOPSIS | 4 |
| PLAYWRIGHT BIO – ISAAC GÓMEZ | 4 |
| AUTHOR BIO – ERIKA L. SÁNCHEZ | 4 |
| CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS | 4 |
| BACKGROUND INFO | 5 |
| . Chicago | 5 |
| . History of Mexicans in Chicago..... | 5 |
| . La Villita / Little Village | 6 |
| . Chicago Places That Júlia Visits | 6 |
| . Júlia’s Favorite Things | 6 |
| . Júlia’s Journey | 7 |
| . Quinceañera | 7 |
| . Chihuahua, Mexico | 7 |
| . Before the U.S.-Mexico Border Became the Border | 7 |
| . Coyotes | 8 |
| . Spanish Translations..... | 9 |
| RESOURCES ON GRIEF, MENTAL HEALTH, TRAUMA, AND SUICIDE PREVENTION..... | 10 |
| WORKS CITED | 12 |
| DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES | 13 |

SYNOPSIS

This flourishing and moving adaptation of Erika L. Sánchez's *New York Times* Bestseller follows Júlia, a Chicago high schooler who is totally *not* your perfect Mexican daughter. That was her older sister Olga's role. But everything in Júlia's life changes and feels heavier after Olga dies suddenly, leaving Júlia to manage her family's grief and unravel the secret truth — that her sister may not have been so perfect after all — all while trying to get into college as a first-generation student in New York City to be the famous writer she knows she's destined to be.

As she struggles with the all-too-real challenges of being a teenager today in the city of Chicago, and the feeling that she's failing to become the daughter her sister was and who her parents want her to be, Júlia is left questioning what she really knows about anything.

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter is a love story to young Latinas who, in trying to find the truth about the people and the world around them, end up finding themselves.

PLAYWRIGHT BIO — ISAAC GÓMEZ

Isaac Gómez (*they/them*) is an award-winning Chicago and Los Angeles based playwright and screenwriter originally from El Paso, Texas/Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. They identify as na'wi - the third gender marker of the Rarámuri, a Mexican Indigenous community in northern Chihuahua, of which they're a direct descendent. They're currently under commission with LCT3, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, South Coast Repertory, and Denver Center for the Performing Arts. Their plays have been produced and/or developed by Audible Theater, Center Theatre Group, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Primary Stages, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Goodman Theatre, the Alley Theatre, Seattle Rep, and many others. Their television credits include the Netflix Original Series "Narcos: Mexico," the upcoming Apple TV+ Limited Series "The Last Thing He Told Me," the second season of Paramount TV+'s "Joe Pickett," amongst others. They have sold pilots and features for development with MRC Entertainment, FX, Focus Features, among others. They strive to tell underrepresented stories across all mediums.

AUTHOR BIO — ERIKA L. SÁNCHEZ

Erika L. Sánchez (*she/her*) is the daughter of Mexican immigrants. Her debut poetry collection, *Lessons on Expulsion*, was a finalist for the PEN America Open Book Award. Her debut young adult novel, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* was a #1 *New York Times* bestseller, a National Book Awards finalist, and Tomás Rivera Award winner. *Time* has recognized it as one of the best YA novels of all time. A film adaptation of the novel is in development with MGM Studios' Orion Pictures, directed by America Ferrera. Erika is an executive producer in the project. *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* was adapted for theatre by Isaac Gómez. The stage adaptation premiered at Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago, with subsequent productions at Seattle Rep, Greenway Court Theatre in Los Angeles, and the Denver Center Theatre Company. Also, her novel has been banned across the country. Most recently, Sánchez published a critically acclaimed memoir-in-essays titled *Crying in the Bathroom* with Viking Books. It won the Chicago Review of Books Nonfiction award and has been optioned for television. Sánchez was a Fulbright Scholar, a Poetry Foundation Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Fellow, a Princeton Arts Fellow, a recipient of the Chicago Public Library Foundation's 21st Century Award, and a recipient of the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in poetry. Sánchez earned a BA from UIC and an MFA from the University of New Mexico. Her books have been translated and published in Korea, Taiwan, United Kingdom, Brazil, France, Mexico, Poland, Turkey, and Italy. She's appeared on WGN, PBS, NPR, Good Morning America, Telemundo, Univision, and MSNBC. Erika holds an Honorary Doctorate in Humane Letters from New School University. She is the Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Chair at DePaul University and lives in Chicago with her family. erikalsanchez.com

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

Júlia - 15-18 years old. Thicc/Chubby/Fat/Plus Size. Mexican American/Chicana. Morena or morena clara, just like her dad, Rafael Reyes. Chewed up nails. She wants more than anything to be a famous writer. The odd daughter out. Not your perfect Mexican daughter and Olga's little sister. She/Her/Hers

Olga - permanently 22, but never looked or acted like a normal 22-year-old. Tall, thin, and very light skinned. Almost guéra. All she ever did was go to work, sit at home with her parents, and take one class at the local community college. The perfect Mexican daughter. Except... maybe not. Oh. And she's Júlia's sister. And she's dead. She/Her/Hers

Amá - 40's/50's probably, but more attractive than most people half her age. Mexican. Also known as Amparo Montenegro Reyes. Very light skinned, almost guéra. Almost. Has had a tough life and gives tough love to show for it. She cleans the houses of rich white people in Chicago and has been doing that for like 30 years since she immigrated from Chihuahua, Mexico with Rafael her husband, also known as Apá. Júlia and Olga's mother. Well. I guess just Júlia's now. She/Her/Hers

Apá - 40s/50s probably, but very handsome with a dark mustache that quivers when he tries to hold back

emotions. Mexican. Also known as Rafael Reyes. Definitely rounder. Moreno or darker. Very important. Has lived to see more than most and keeps to himself, so you'd never know it. Works for a candy factory and has been there since he immigrated to Chicago with Amá back in the 1990's. A softy at heart and Júlia's father. He/Him/His

Lorena - mid to late teens. Mexican American/Chicana. The craziest b---- in the entire school. Some might judge her, but she likes the way she looks and dresses and has no shame in her body. Morena or morena clara. Has been through more than most teens her age and so her tough persona is a manifestation of that. No one is more loyal than her. Chola energy 100%. Aspires to be a nurse and is Júlia's bestest friend in the entire world since they were 8 years old. She/Her/Hers

Juanga - mid to late teens. Mexican American/Chicano/e. The newest member of the Lorena/Júlia group. They see him and he sees them. His real name is Juan Garcia but everyone calls him Juanga. Femme AF and couldn't be more proud of it. Moreno/e or Moreno/e claro. He can be kind of a b----, but really just wants to be seen and loved. Makes his own identity so others will like him. He/Him/His and/or They/Them/Theirs

Connor - mid to late teens. White. The dreamiest white boy in all of Evanston. Yes, that's right. Evanston. The richest, whitest, most colonialist suburb of the Chicagoland area. It's okay though 'cause he reads a lot so he kind of knows what's up. Total book nerd, video game nerd, movie nerd— just a total nerd. No one could be more enamored of Júlia than Connor. He/Him/His

Mr. Ingman - 40s/50s. White. Júlia's high school English teacher. More passionate about teaching than most. He is one of those teachers you can't help but fall in love with while learning from them. But he's not a creep, and never abuses his relationships with his students, no. He just simply has a way of making them feel like they're actual humans with thoughts, desires, dreams, passions, fears, and so on. He/Him/His

BACKGROUND INFO

Chicago

Chicago is the most populated city in the Midwestern United States. With a population of 2,746,388, as of the 2020 census, it is the third-most populous city in the United States after New York City and Los Angeles. As the second-most populous county in the U.S., Chicago is the center of the Chicago metropolitan area, often colloquially called Chicagoland and home to 9.6 million residents. Major sections of the city include the central business district, called the Loop (downtown area) and the North, South, and West Sides. The Loop is where all the city train lines — colloquially called the El or L by locals as many of the trains are elevated — connect and make a literal loop! There are [178 official neighborhoods](#) in Chicago and the city is also divided into [77 community areas](#) which were drawn by University of Chicago researchers in the late 1920s.

The three sides of the city are represented on the Flag of Chicago by three horizontal stripes. The North Side is the most-densely-populated residential section of the city, and many high-rises are located on this side of the city along the lakefront. The South Side is the largest section of the city, encompassing roughly 60% of the city's land area.

History of Mexicans in Chicago

Despite the city of Chicago's diversity amongst its population today — one-third white, one-third Black, one-third Latino and one-tenth Asian — there is a long-history of excluding non-European folks. The first major wave of Mexican migration to Chicago began in the mid-late 1910s, spurred on by the economic, social, and political displacements of the Mexican Revolution years and the rise in industrial and agricultural employment in the U.S. Like many of the African American workers of the Great Migration, some Mexicans were hired to break steel and packinghouse strikes in the late 1910s and early 1920s, placing them in conflict with European workers. Initially, labor recruiters worked in northern Mexico and parts of the U.S. southwest to recruit Mexican laborers. Migration accelerated in the 1920s as word spread of available work in Chicago. After arriving in Chicago, however, workers discovered that housing was substandard, crowded, and expensive. Much of the housing was owned by other immigrant groups who frequently charged Mexicans higher rents. Mexicans often responded by having more people living together in order to pay the expensive rents, thus compounding health and sanitation problems in already dilapidated buildings. Many of those who worked on the railroad, the *traqueros*, lived in boxcars along the tracks, their homes literally mobile as demand for workers rose and fell. Mexican residential segregation, however, was not as pronounced as that of African Americans. Colonias, Mexican residential enclaves, sprouted within the industrial sectors of the Calumet region (southeast), on the Near West Side, and in the Back of the Yards area. This largely Mexican population lived amid several large Eastern and Southern European groups. Mexican migration into Chicago reached new heights during WWI and WWII. [Between 1943 and 1945, over 15,000 braceros](#), guest workers under contract with the U.S. and Mexican governments, arrived in the city to work. Many stayed after their contracts ended or returned to Chicago in the years after the war. By the late 1940s, Mexican settlements outside the city grew as well — [similar to Chicago's suburb population today](#). Despite a growing presence throughout metropolitan Chicago, Mexicans continued to face discrimination and renewed threats of repatriation. National programs were created, specifically targeting Mexicans, such as [Operation Wetback](#) — a 1954 immigration law enforcement initiative that utilized military-style tactics to [remove Mexican immigrants, some of them American citizens](#) from the United States. While working to ensure economic stability, leaders of Chicago's Mexican communities supported the education of workers and the development of civic and community institutions like the Mexican Civic Committee, founded in 1943. As before the war, employers used Mexicans as strikebreakers. Inland Steel, for instance, imported 250 Mexican workers from Texas

in May of 1947 to work in place of striking steelworkers. When these Mexican workers marched in solidarity with strikers and demanded transportation back to Texas, it attested to Chicago's growing working-class solidarity as well as the power of Mexican workers. In the 1950s, Chicago Mexicans went on to establish branches of [civil rights](#) organizations already active in the Southwest, including the GI Forum and League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). The GI Forum fought for the rights of Mexican WWII veterans who were too often denied GI benefits. LULAC sought to increase the numbers of Mexicans with U.S. citizenship and to secure the rights of Mexican Americans. Mexicans continued to live in the colonias of Back of the Yards and South Chicago, but with the construction of the University of Illinois at Chicago, those living in the Near West Side area moved south to Pilsen. In the mid-1970s, this colonia expanded past 26th Street and was known as La Villita (Little Village) — where the Reyes family lives. Together these neighborhoods have become the fastest-growing areas of Mexican — and increasingly Central American — settlement in Chicago. Ignited by the Chicano Movement in other parts of the United States, a thriving mural movement developed in the streets of Pilsen and La Villita as muralists brought art to the streets while claiming those same streets with their paints. In 1987 the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum opened, and its internationally acclaimed exhibits and collections have made it one of the premiere institutes of Mexican art in the country. Júlia and Olga's parents, Amparo Montenegro Reyes and Rafael Reyes immigrated from the state of Chihuahua, Mexico to Chicago in the 1990's. According to the U.S. 2020 Census, [1 in 5 Chicagoans identify as Mexican](#).

La Villita / Little Village

Officially part of the South Lawndale community, the Little Village neighborhood is brimming with Mexican-American culture. Before it was known as La Villita, Little Village saw an influx of German, Czech, and Polish immigrants following the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. At that time, many people worked in the nearby factories, and it has been a working-class community ever since. In the 1970s, Little Village started to become known as the Mexico of the Midwest as more Mexican-Americans moved into the neighborhood. Today, a terracotta arch towering over 26th Street greets people with, "Bienvenidos a Little Village." Designed by Mexican architect Adrian Lozano, the arch was built in 1990 to acknowledge the influence of Mexican culture in Chicago. When Amparo and Rafael came to Chicago, the arch was already built. Recently, the city of Chicago [designated the Little Village Arch as a landmark](#). Every September, the neighborhood also hosts a large annual parade in honor of Mexican Independence Day with colorful floats, mariachi bands, and dancing. According to the [Little Village Chamber of Commerce](#), La Villita has more than 1,000 businesses. Approximately 500 of those businesses are along a two-mile stretch of 26th Street, mostly between Kedzie and Kostner avenues. Local media have dubbed the area the "Mexican Magnificent Mile." [Crain's Chicago reported in 2015](#) that it's not only one of the busiest shopping districts in the city after the Magnificent Mile, but also in the Midwest, with \$900 million in sales annually. It has chain stores, but also small mom-and-pop shops, with everything from barber shops to bakeries and specialty grocery stores.

Chicago Places That Júlia Visits

The El or L: The Chicago El or L — short for elevated — is the rapid transit system serving the city of Chicago and some of its surrounding suburbs and is how Júlia and many Chicagoans get around the city.

West Loop: A Chicago neighborhood located just west of downtown / the Loop. The West Loop was formerly an industrial zone, but today is a hip dining and nightlife hotspot with tons of delicious restaurants.

Lincoln Park: One of the wealthiest and most expensive communities in Chicago — with the average single-family house priced around \$1 million, many homes in the area sell for more than \$10 million. This affluent neighborhood is located on the city's North Side and home to DePaul University and many brownstones.

Garfield Park Conservatory: One of the largest and most stunning conservatories in the nation. Often referred to as "landscape art under glass," the Garfield Park Conservatory occupies 2 acres of public greenhouse space and 10 acres of outdoor gardens. Júlia, Lorena and Juanga go on a field trip here.

Myopic Books: A three-level used bookstore, located in the Wicker Park neighborhood of Chicago. Myopic Books has been around for over 30 years, houses over 60,000 volumes, and is book-lover's dream!

Evanston: A suburb of Chicago located 13 miles north of downtown Chicago and home to Northwestern University. Despite being a suburb outside of the metropolis, Evanston is more expensive than living in Chicago. When Júlia goes to Evanston, she has to take 3 different trains to get there!

Millennium Park: A public park located in the Loop community area of Chicago near the city's Lake Michigan shoreline. One of Chicago's most iconic attractions and home to some of the city's most famous landmarks including: the Bean, Pritzker Pavilion (a popular venue for outdoor concerts in the warmer months), and the interactive Crown Fountain. In the winter months there's ice skating on the McCormick Tribune Plaza ice rink.

Júlia's Favorite Things

Júlia loves to read and can't decide what her favorite book is; here are the select few she's able to name: *The Awakening*, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, and *The Bluest Eye*. In addition to books, Júlia loves pizza, David Bowie, and her favorite color is red.

Júlia's Journey

[Here is an interactive map](#) highlighting all of the places Júlia frequents in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* — it can put into perspective the distance. Although Evanston is only 13 miles north of Chicago's Loop and 20 miles from Júlia's neighborhood of Little Village, it still takes her **almost 2 hours** to get there!

Here are the directions from her apartment in Little Village to Connor's house in Evanston:

1. Begin by walking north on South Kedzie Ave towards West 25th Street until reaching the Kedzie **Pink Line** station
2. Get on the **Pink Line** going towards the Loop for *10 stops*
3. Get off at State / Lake
4. Walk towards Lake St until reaching Lake **Red Line** station
5. Get on the **Red Line** going towards Howard for *16 stops*
6. Get off at the last station on the line, Howard, and walk across the platform to catch the **Purple Line**
7. Get on the **Purple Line** at Howard Station going towards Linden
8. Get off at the last station on the line, Linden, and exit
9. Walk south on Benson Ave towards Davis Street
10. Turn right onto Davis St
11. Arrived in Evanston

Quinceañera

A quinceañera is the celebration of a girl's 15th birthday, marking her rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood; the term is also used for the celebrant herself. The quinceañera is both a religious and a social event that emphasizes the importance of family and society in the life of a young woman. It is celebrated in Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean, as well as in Latino communities in the United States and elsewhere. The celebration begins with a mass attended by the girl, her family and godparents. Mass is followed by a reception, or party, to which friends and relatives are invited. The reception features food, music and dancing, with the girl accompanied by her court. Symbolic actions may include the presentation of a doll to a younger relative, to show that the celebrant is giving up her childhood, and the placement of heeled shoes on her feet, to indicate that she is ready for womanhood. Traditionally, the dance portion of the quince includes a choreographed waltz-type dance that is prepared and is considered one of the main events of the evening along with the father-daughter dance. Toasts are often offered, and sometimes the cutting of a fancy cake is involved. The celebration is generally as elaborate as the means of the family will allow. Although the quince observance originally signified that the girl was prepared for marriage, the modern celebration is more likely to signal the beginning of formal dating. Some girls opt for a trip instead of a party, while others decide not to celebrate their 15th birthday in the traditional way. Like many other rites and ceremonies, quinceañeras continue to evolve. The quinceañera traditionally wears a ball gown, with her court dressed in gowns and tuxedos. In the past, it was common for girls to wear white dresses, but now they choose from a wide range of colors and themes for their special day.

Chihuahua, Mexico

Located in northern Mexico, the state of Chihuahua is one of the 31 states that comprise the 32 federal entities of Mexico. Chihuahua is Mexico's largest state, and its capital is Chihuahua City. Chihuahua is the state that Amparo and Rafael are from, but the town of Los Ojos doesn't exist. Although Chihuahua is primarily identified with its namesake, the Chihuahuan Desert, it has more forests than any other state in Mexico, aside from the state of Durango. The state is mostly characterized by rugged mountainous terrain and wide river valleys. The Sierra Madre mountain range — part of the continental spine that also includes the Rocky Mountains — dominates the state's terrain and is home to its most impressive attraction, attraction, [Las Barrancas del Cobre \(Copper Canyon\)](#), is not only larger and more spectacular than the Grand Canyon, it's nearly inaccessible aside from a railway that traverses through. The vast Chihuahuan Desert dominates the northeastern half of the state. Before arriving in the U.S. and taking the bus to Chicago from El Paso, Texas, Amparo and Rafael walked through the Chihuahuan Desert through the guidance of a coyote. Western Chihuahua, however, is broken by the Sierra Madre Mountains and its spurs, which form high fertile valleys and deep canyons.

Before the U.S.-Mexico Border Became the Border

While in Chihuahua with Esteban, Júlia discusses the idea of el otro lado (the other side / the United States - Mexico border). The United States-Mexico border came into existence during the 1800s. After Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1810 and the United States annexed Texas in 1845, tension and conflict arose in the Texas region when the two countries couldn't decide / agree upon whose territory was whose. This resulted in the [Mexican-American War](#), which began in 1846 and ended in 1848 with the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#). In the terms of the treaty, [Mexico lost more than 960,000 square miles or 55% of land](#) including what is today California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, and parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Kansas, and Oklahoma.

The border wasn't always so heavily militarized as it is today. Even before the United States and Mexico made any claim to the land, indigenous peoples like the Kumeyaay in California, the Tohono O'odham in Arizona, and the Lipan Apache of New Mexico and Texas inhabited the Southwest for generations. Their descendants [now must contend](#) with physical structures that partition the lands their ancestors traversed without any barriers.

Border Patrol was not created until 1924 to enforce immigration restrictions, initially without a clear mandate from Congress. Nonetheless for decades afterward, there remained few physical barriers between the United States and Mexico. In fact, passing through the border didn't require a passport.

The United States has a long history of allowing immigrants to enter the country solely for economic benefit. This is clearly seen through the Bracero Program which was a series of diplomatic agreements between the US and Mexico that was put into effect when there was a need for labor in agriculture during World War II. The agreement guaranteed decent living conditions and a minimum wage of 30 cents an hour. The Bracero Program began in 1942 and ended in 1964.

As time moved on, the politics of the border changed. Many believe the security and militarization of the border changed after 9/11 or during the Trump administration. But the scope of the US-Mexico border changed drastically during the Clinton administration in 1994 through [Operation Gatekeeper](#). More specifically, this political measure was implemented to concentrate border agents and add fencing along populated areas near the border — sound familiar? Due to the drastic change from a peaceful US-Mexico border to a highly militarized border, crossings through the desert and Chihuahuan Desert increased. The Chihuahuan Desert spans through New Mexico and parts of Texas along 268 miles of the border. It has been the busiest area for migrant crossings into the U.S. Southwest at a time when overall border apprehensions are on track to match or surpass record levels. Migrant advocates and academics have said for years that policies like increased fencing and checkpoints, intended to deter those aiming to cross illegally into the U.S., push migrants to take increasingly perilous routes to evade detection. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) documented 686 deaths and disappearances of migrants on the US-Mexico border in 2022, making it the deadliest land route for migrants worldwide on record. The figure represents nearly half of the 1,457 migrant deaths and disappearances recorded throughout the Americas in 2022, the deadliest year on record since IOM's Missing Migrants Project (MMP) began in 2014. In 2022, nearly half (307) of the deaths on the United States-Mexico border were linked to the hazardous crossing of the Sonoran and Chihuahuan Deserts, far more than other desert regions where irregular migration is prevalent. The story of what happens to Lorena's father when he crossed the desert to go to his mother's funeral is an example of how the death toll along the border has increased. A highly militarized border pushes immigrants from Latin America toward desolate terrain, such as the Chihuahuan Desert, where they were more likely to die from starvation and overexposure to extreme levels of heat and cold. Essentially, because of Operation Gatekeeper being implemented at major points of the US-Mexico border, Amparo, Rafael, and Lorena's father had to walk through the Chihuahuan Desert — which is a 4 day walk and 293 miles total!

[Here is an interactive map](#) highlighting the places Júlia frequents and how far Amparo and Rafael traveled to get from Chihuahua City to El Paso, Texas

Coyotes

Amparo and Rafael come into the United States through the help of a coyote (a human smuggler). Many migrants wanting to enter the United States hire coyotes to guide them. Since the 90s, the price of coyotes has increased. Today, migrants entering from Mexico pay coyote fees of about \$4,000-10,000. The fees are so high in order to pay off government officials, gangs operating on trains and drug cartels controlling the routes north. In addition to this, coyotes are notorious for nickel and diming or [becoming violent](#).

Since the end of the 19th century, coyotes have been a part of the migratory process for many Mexican migrants. From 1882 to 1917, a series of U.S. legislations contributed to the rise of the coyote in undocumented border crossings. The [Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882](#) and [Immigration Act of 1885](#) caused the flow of labor to decline. This led to severe labor shortages in the south-western and western regions of the country. The demand for Mexican workers from U.S. employers rose and by 1884, supply was guaranteed when the railway connection of El Paso, Texas, with Mexico was completed. Explicit restrictions on Mexican immigration during the late 1910s and early 1920s caused U.S. labor-seeking migrants to increasingly rely on middlemen for labor-brokerage with American companies.

Ciudad Juarez became a hub for coyotes during the mid-1920s. Coyote fees were considerably less than those needed for visitor's visas; an approximate \$100 to \$150 difference (based on today's exchange rate). Crossings were widely successful with the prevalent use of false documents or leased legitimate documents. Upon arrival in the U.S., coyotes were paid their fees and migrants were delivered to their employers. Competition for Mexican workers grew so high among labor contractors that it even inspired a short-lived coyote system in the U.S. The popularity of the Bracero Program resulted in a greater Mexican demand for guest-worker contracts than there were contracts to give. Consequently, thousands of Mexican laborers unable to participate in the program sought the help of coyotes to enter the U.S. By 1950, the United States Border Patrol relied on approximately 1,000 agents to patrol the border. Mexican migrants seeking entry relied on the coyote's guidance to avoid border patrol and crossing the Rio Grande became the route of choice. This was achieved mostly by boat or more dangerously, by swimming, thus creating the horrible slur "wetbacks." In 1953, Border Patrol reported to have detained 1,545 "alien smugglers" along the border. The end of the Bracero Program would lead to greater border crossings

[The Immigration Reform and Control Act \(IRCA\)](#) was passed in 1986 under the Reagan administration. It created an amnesty program allowing currently undocumented immigrants the opportunity to legalize their status in the United States and eventually obtain citizenship, and established employer sanctions against individuals hiring undocumented workers. To obtain amnesty, migrants had to demonstrate they had been continuously living in the United States since 1982. Documents of proof included pay stubs, rent receipts, bank statements, and affidavits from persons who knew them during the period they had resided illegally. The IRCA also required employers to ask potential employees for documents confirming their authorization to work in the United States. As a result of both provisions, a black market of counterfeit documents emerged catering to the demand.

Since 9/11, the U.S. government has taken numerous measures to tighten security along the U.S.- Mexico border. Increased surveillance makes crossing much more difficult, but not impossible. In reality, when economic conditions in Latin America deteriorate, the motivation to come and work in the U.S. only rises, leaving potential migrants one realistic option — engaging a coyote. Avoiding the attention of border patrol even as the security and restrictions increase, helping migrants get around them is the primary focus of coyotes. This is because it is their job to guide their clients around these dangers. A skilled coyote will know the movements of the border patrol and when and how it is best for a person to sneak across. Some may try instead of getting over a border wall to slip past the patrol by pretending to be a valid, inconspicuous traveler. In the group of people that work as coyotes there are two important subgroups that have been categorized, the interior and exterior coyotes. Both groups work to get migrants into the United States; however, they do it in different ways and will take different types of people. Which group a migrant uses (if they do choose to use a coyote and don't go alone or with their own group), depends on many factors such as if they are familiar with what they need to do to get into the U.S. along with what connections they have to both people in the U.S. and with prospective coyotes.

Spanish Translations (in order of appearance in the play)

La Virgencita: Often used colloquially to refer to the Virgin Mary, also known as Our Lady of Guadalupe or La Morenita, is a cultural symbol and Catholic site that is a form of the Virgin Mary and the patron saint of Mexico.

Caca: Poop / crap

Que malcriada: How bratty / spoiled / impolite / rude

Como te gusta la mala vida: Choosing a bad life / the dissolute lifestyle suits you

Mija: meaning my daughter, *mija* is used as a familiar and affectionate address to women, like dear or honey.

Pobresita: translates roughly to poor thing or poor baby and is an appropriate word to use to show empathy with an endearing connotation.

Piñata: a container, often made of papier-mâché, pottery, or cloth, that is decorated, filled with candy, and then broken as part of a celebration.

Tía: Aunt

Tortillas: made of flour in northern Mexico, tortillas are primarily made of corn masa as corn is native to Mexico.

Quesadilla: In the United States, a half-folded taco heated directly on a grill with any cheese, usually in a flour tortilla. In central and southern Mexico, a blue corn tortilla filled with any *guisado* (A broad term, but usually refers to braises and stews), with or without cheese. It bears repeating, a *quesadilla* in Mexico can go without cheese.

Tío: Uncle

Carne asada: grilled and sliced flank steak

Al pastor: spit-grilled slices of pork, often served with pineapple

Quinceañera: the celebration of a girl's 15th birthday, marking her passage from girlhood to womanhood.

Santa Muerte: or more formally, *Nuestra Señora de la Santa Muerte* (Our Lady of Holy Death) is the personification of death herself. *Santa Muerte* is a thin, skeletal figure, often depicted as a female Grim Reaper and is associated with healing, protection and safe delivery to the afterlife by her devotees. *Santa Muerte* almost always appears as a female skeletal figure, clad in a long robe and holding one or more objects, usually a scythe and a globe. Her robe can be of any color, as more specific images of the figure vary widely from devotee to devotee and according to the ritual being performed or the petition being made.

Quince: The number 15, fifteen. Can abbreviate *quinceañera* to quince.

Feminista: Feminist

Callate la boca: Shut up / Shut your mouth

Chiles: Hot pepper

El Jefe: The boss

Bigotes: Mustache

Pues: Well / Since / Then

Que paso, hermano: What's going on bro?

Y Rafa: And where's Rafael?

Si, gracias a Dios: Yes, thank God.

Queso: Cheese

Con frijoles y sopita: With beans and *sopita* (Mexican noodle soup)

Señorita: Miss / lady

Borracho: Drunk

Hermana: Sister

Andale: Hurry up / come along

El guero: Fair-haired person

Mira: Look

La chinga: Pain in the butt / nightmare

Tu: without an accent it means "your"

Muñeca: Doll

Chambelán: a male member of the court of honor at a quinceañera

La luna: The moon

Lotería: a traditional Mexican board game of chance, similar to bingo, and is played on a deck of cards instead of numbered ping pong balls. Every image has a name and an assigned number, but the number is usually ignored.

Sucia: Impure / dirty

Una cochina: Pig / filthy / rotten / lousy

Pero: But

Cierre la puerta: Close the door

Estás bien: Are you OK?

Medicina: Medicine / pills

Hola prima: Hi cousin

Mi niña: My girl

Y todo: And all

Buenas tardes, señoritas: Good afternoon, ladies.

Pesado: Boring / tiresome / annoying

Cuidala: Take care

El otro lado: The other side / another side / somewhere else / the U.S. - Mexico border

Mole: A sauce with ingredients from five different categories: chiles (at least two different types); sour (tomatoes or tomatillos); sweet (dried fruits or sugar); spices; and thickeners (bread, tortillas, nuts or seeds). Once the paste is formed, it's mixed with water or broth, and then simmered for hours until it's thick.

Verdad: True

Te verás: To see / to verify / to witness / to check

Amorcita: My love / sweetheart / darling / sweetie

El coyote: a human smuggler. Many migrants wanting to enter the United States hire coyotes to guide them.

Claro: Of course

Narcos: Drug trafficker

Bueno: Good / well

Que bueno: Excellent

Nueva York: New York

Chicago es mucho mejor: Chicago is much better.

Ay, como nos haces sufrir: Oh, how you make us suffer

No se si maldecirte o por ti rezar: I don't know whether to curse you or pray for you.

Perdóname: Forgive me

Por si se te antoja algo: Just in case you crave / feel like you want anything

Resources on grief, mental health, trauma, and suicide prevention

[Latinx Therapy \(https://latinxtherapy.com/\)](https://latinxtherapy.com/) — since 2018 Latinx Therapy has been destigmatizing mental health in the Latinx community and have since launched a bilingual podcast ([listen here https://latinxtherapy.com/podcast/](https://latinxtherapy.com/podcast/)), a national directory to find a Latinx therapist with 98% of the directory speak Spanish (<https://latinxtherapy.com/find-a-therapist/>), a blog (<https://latinxtherapy.com/blog/>), additional resources including reading lists for children and adults in English and Spanish (<https://latinxtherapy.com/resources/>), and [even merch https://latinxtherapy.com/shop/!](https://latinxtherapy.com/shop/)

[Hope For the Day \(https://www.hftd.org/\)](https://www.hftd.org/) — a nonprofit created in 2011 to honor all the friends and family members who had died by suicide. Suicide has no prejudice, and 700,000 suicides are reported each year, with many more going unreported. In the US alone, over 130 individuals complete suicide on a daily basis. Suicide is a preventable mental health crisis. The primary obstacle to suicide prevention is the silence of stigma. Stigmas are social and cultural factors that try to dictate how we express ourselves and compel individuals to be silent on their internal experiences. Too often, we do not discuss mental health or suicide until it directly impacts our community.

[National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\) \(https://www.nami.org/\)](https://www.nami.org/), the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

[American Association of Suicidology \(AAS\) \(https://suicidology.org/\)](https://suicidology.org/), is the world's largest and nation's oldest membership-based suicide prevention organization. Founded in 1969, AAS provides general guidelines for a school-based suicide prevention program.

[American Foundation for Suicide Prevention \(AFSP\) \(https://afsp.org/\)](https://afsp.org/), is a voluntary health organization that gives those affected by suicide a nationwide community empowered by research, education and advocacy to take action against this leading cause of death.

[Dougy Center \(https://www.dougy.org/\)](https://www.dougy.org/), provides local peer grief support, resources, and training to individuals and organizations seeking to assist children and teens in grief from loss. The first peer group that ever met was four boys, who each had a father die. They talked, played, and connected with one another in a way they couldn't with friends who didn't understand what they were each going through.

[The Jason Foundation \(https://jasonfoundation.com/\)](https://jasonfoundation.com/), is a nonprofit dedicated to the prevention of the "Silent

Epidemic” of youth suicide through educational and awareness programs that equip young people, educators/ youth workers and parents with the tools and resources to help identify and assist at-risk youth. Clark Flatt, president of the nonprofit [tells the story of his youngest son Jason who died by suicide in 1997 \(https://jasonfoundation.com/about-us/jasons-story/\)](https://jasonfoundation.com/about-us/jasons-story/), “My son, Jason became a statistic of the ‘Silent Epidemic’ of youth suicide. In trying to come to terms with what happened, I began researching youth suicide. The statistics are very alarming. Did you know that on average, over 100 young people this week will become victims of youth suicide? Youth suicide can be prevented, and that is what The Jason Foundation is all about. I urge you to get involved. Together we can help stop this epidemic. Ask for our material. Read it. Then share it with your friends, family and others. Please help us reach out to hurting teens with another choice.”

[The Trevor Project \(https://www.thetrevorproject.org/\)](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/) is committed to ending suicide among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning young people. LGBTQ+ young people are four times more likely to attempt suicide, and suicide remains the second leading cause of death among all young people in the U.S. To speak with a trained counselor 24/7, [click here \(https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/\)](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help/). They will listen without judgment — text, chat, or call — all of your conversations are confidential, and you can share as much or as little as you’d like.

[Crisis Text Line \(https://www.crisistextline.org/\)](https://www.crisistextline.org/) provides free 24/7 high-quality text-based mental health support and crisis intervention, essentially meeting people and their mental well-being wherever they are. [Reach a Crisis Counselor here \(https://www.crisistextline.org/text-us/\)](https://www.crisistextline.org/text-us/) or volunteer to become a Crisis Counselor [here \(https://www.crisistextline.org/become-a-volunteer/\)](https://www.crisistextline.org/become-a-volunteer/).

[RAINN \(Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network\) \(https://rainn.org/\)](https://rainn.org/) is the nation’s largest anti-sexual violence organization and comprised of experts in victim services, public education, public policy, consulting services, and technology. In addition, RAINN created and operates the [National Sexual Assault Hotline \(https://rainn.org/about-national-sexual-assault-telephone-hotline\)](https://rainn.org/about-national-sexual-assault-telephone-hotline) (800.656.HOPE, [online.rainn.org](https://rainn.org) y rainn.org/es in Spanish) in partnership with more than 1,000 local sexual assault service providers across the country to provide best-in-class services for survivors, inform and educate the nation about sexual violence, and improve the public policy and criminal justice response to sexual violence. Visit <https://rainn.org/programs-and-expertise> to learn more about RAINN’s programs and visit https://centers.rainn.org/?_ga=2.25109498.1100420446.1724257075-600767490.1724257075 to find help near you.

[Joyful Heart Foundation \(https://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/\)](https://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/)- When Mariska Hargitay started playing Olivia Benson on “Law & Order: Special Victims’ Unit”, the content of the scripts opened her eyes to the staggering statistics about sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse in the U.S. She received hundreds, then thousands of letters and emails from survivors disclosing their stories of abuse, many for the first time. She wanted to answer—really answer—those letters, to address the suffering they described, and honor acts of courage they represented. Her response was to create the [Joyful Heart Foundation](https://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/). Through their [advocacy programs \(https://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/programs/policy-advocacy\)](https://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/programs/policy-advocacy), Joyful Heart seeks greater access to justice and healing for survivors by working to improve the criminal justice and community responses to violence and abuse through reforms to laws and policies. We want to bring more compassion and less judgment for survivors and to enhance their access to justice, if that’s what they choose.

[VictimConnect Resource Center \(VCRC\) \(https://victimconnect.org/\)](https://victimconnect.org/) is a weekday phone, chat, and text-based referral helpline for all victims of crime in the United States and its territories that provides emotional support, information, and individualized referral. VCRC is a program of the [National Center for Victims of Crime \(NCVC\) \(https://victimconnect.org/\)](https://victimconnect.org/), a nonprofit organization that advocates for victims’ rights, trains professionals who work with victims, and serves as a trusted source of information on victims’ issues.

If You Have Thoughts of Suicide

At times, people with complicated grief may consider suicide. If you’re thinking about suicide, talk to someone you trust. If you think you may act on suicidal feelings, call 911 or your local emergency services number right away. Or contact a suicide hotline. In the U.S., call or text 988 to reach the [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline \(https://988lifeline.org/get-help/\)](https://988lifeline.org/get-help/), available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Or use the [Lifeline Chat \(https://chat.988lifeline.org/\)](https://chat.988lifeline.org/). *All services are free and confidential. (https://988lifeline.org/)*

WORKS CITED

<https://www.npr.org/2012/04/19/150973748/inside-the-hidden-world-of-immigrant-smuggling>
<https://www.npr.org/2012/04/19/150973748/inside-the-hidden-world-of-immigrant-smuggling>
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2023-01-20/us-mexico-border-coyotes-are-often-vulnerable-themselves?embedded-checkout=true>
<https://braceroarchive.org/>
<https://theworld.org/stories/2014/08/11/how-coyotes-use-facebook-smuggle>
<https://www.chicago.gov/city/en.html>
<https://www.chicagotribune.com/2024/04/20/after-25-years-of-selling-tamales-in-chicago-a-mother-in-us-illegally-returns-to-mexico-without-her-family/>
Making Mexican Chicago: From Postwar Settlement to the Age of Gentrification by Mike Amezcua
<https://documents.latimes.com/june-12-1954-wetbacks-detention-camp-slated/>
<https://www.history.com/news/operation-wetback-eisenhower-1954-deportation>
<https://chicagomap.zolk.com/>
<https://www.latinopolicyforum.org/publications/body/Latinos-in-the-Suburbs-Challenges-and-Opportunities.pdf>
https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/doit/general/GIS/Chicago_Maps/Citywide_Maps/City_Neighborhoods_1978_11x17.pdf
<https://news.wttw.com/2015/10/07/little-village-s-26th-street-corridor-next-mag-mile>
<https://littlevillagechamber.org/>
<https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dcd/provdrs/hist/news/2022/january/little-village-arch-designated-as-landmark.html>
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/metro-state/2023/9/26/23890951/mexican-population-census-chicago-suburbs>
<https://latinxtherapy.com/>
<https://www.hftd.org/>
<https://www.nami.org/>
<https://suicidology.org/>
<https://afsp.org/>
<https://www.dougy.org/>
<https://jasonfoundation.com/>
<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>
<https://www.crisistextline.org/>
<https://rainn.org/>
<https://www.joyfulheartfoundation.org/>
<https://victimconnect.org/>
<https://988lifeline.org/>

I AM NOT YOUR PERFECT MEXICAN DAUGHTER

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Pre-Show Questions

1. What is the difference between what we think we know about our family member's lives and what we know about our family member's lives? In what ways does our understanding change as we get older?
2. What does the term "American Dream" mean to you? Has the definition of the American Dream changed from generation to generation; from culture to culture; or is it the same for everyone? Is the American Dream possible? Why or why not?
3. In what ways do people deal with grief and loss?

Post-Show Questions

1. How do the scenic elements of set design, costuming, lighting, and sound help tell the story? Which are the most effective and why?
2. What does the title, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* mean?
3. How would you describe the relationship between Júlia and her parents? How does the information she learns change this relationship?
4. How would you describe the parenting style of Amá and Apá?
5. How would you describe the relationship that Júlia has with her friends, Juanga and Lorena? How do the friends help/hinder Júlia's growth?
6. Why does Júlia feel that Amá blames her for her sister's death?
7. Why does Júlia feel it necessary to investigate Olga's life? What does she expect to find out about her older sister and what does she learn?
8. Why is it so important to Amá that Júlia has a Quinceañera? Why does Júlia resist the party?
9. How does the setting inform the play? Explain how the setting becomes a character in the play. If the play were set somewhere else, how would this effect the play?
10. How do the seasons and personal milestones play into the timeline of the story?
11. Explain how does the doubling of the actors portraying the characters enhance or detract from the play? Why do you think that actor that portrays Olga also portrays the other characters?
12. How does Júlia identify herself? What happens when a person defines themselves by something they are not?
13. How do the different characters deal with their grief and loss? Why does Lorena have a shrine for the dead?
14. Why do the characters keep telling Amá that Júlia needs to go back to the country that she is not from?

Activities

Scrapbook- A Day in Your Life

Materials: Digital Camera, Computer, Printer

1. Create a visual scrapbook of your day. Using a digital camera, document your day by taking pictures. Take pictures of things that you are doing, people that you meet, images that you see and anything else that may describe what you see and do in a given day.
2. From your library of pictures, select between 10 to 15 images and print them. Assemble the pictures in either a slideshow format or as part of a collage.
3. Share your scrapbook with others.
4. Discuss which images evoke mood and story. How does it capture your day? Were there any images that you had to discard? Were there any images that you were not able to capture that you wanted to add?

Colorado PG Visual Art: Recognize, articulate, and debate that the visual arts are a means for expression.

Colorado PG Visual Art: Explain, demonstrate, and interpret a range of purposes of art and design, recognizing that the making and study of art and design can be approached from a variety of viewpoints, intelligences, and perspectives.

Page to Stage: Adapting *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*

1. Start by picking a short excerpt from the novel *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika L. Sánchez. After reading the excerpt, find some key themes and character choices that you can adapt into a monologue or scene of dialogue for the stage.
2. Having paid close attention to the dialogue and action found in the excerpt, adapt what is written in the novel into theatrical dialogue or monologue.
3. After writing the first draft, have students cast their theatrical adaptations and read them aloud.
4. Discuss the differences between the novel and the theatrical adaptations. What did the playwrights do to convey the characters and plot found in the literary example? Did they have to invent, delete, or change anything to better communicate the story from page to stage? How does hearing the words spoken differ from reading the words on the page?
5. Raising the bar: Following the first theatrical adaptation, instruct the playwrights to change a point of view. What changes would have to be made to clearly show that the events found in the first draft are now being described from a different character's perspective?
6. After seeing the production, what did the adapting playwright, Isaac Gómez, modify to tell his version of Erika L. Sánchez's story? What were the differences between the scenes that were written in class? Does a play adaptation limit or expand a literary work's possibilities?

Writing PG: Effectively use content-specific language, style, tone and text structure to compose or adapt writing for different audiences and purposes.

Writing PG: Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.

Drama and Theatre Arts PG: Employ drama and theatre skills, and articulate the aesthetics of a variety of characters and roles.

SEE YOURSELF ON STAGE

Theatre Education
at the DCPA



PreK - Adult | No Experience Required | 1-Day Workshops
Multi-Week Courses | Daytime, Evening, and Weekend Classes

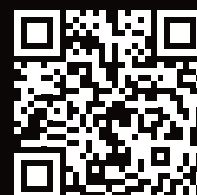


DENVER CENTER FOR THE
PERFORMING ARTS
Education & Community Engagement

Sponsored by



uhealth



**ENROLL
TODAY**

[DENVERCENTER.ORG/EDUCATION](https://denvercenter.org/education)

Photo by McLeod9 Creative