

**SEATTLE**  
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**I AM NOT  
YOUR PERFECT  
MEXICAN  
DAUGHTER**

**Play Guide**

*Courtesy of Steppenwolf Theatre*

# FINDING LAS MALCRIADAS: GETTING TO KNOW ERIKA L. SÁNCHEZ

By Education Apprentice Elon Sloan



## Who is Erika L. Sánchez?

Erika L. Sánchez, author of *The New York Times* Best Seller *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, grew up in Cicero, Illinois, a suburb located immediately west of Chicago's Little Village neighborhood. The daughter of two undocumented Mexican immigrants, Sánchez describes her younger self as an avid reader, writer and an overall nerdy kid. Sánchez credits her teachers for fostering her passion for writing and seeing her "weird interests" and encouraging them. She fondly remembers one teacher who assembled packets of poetry for her to read, gifts she's kept since her youth. This support from her teachers led her to pursue a career in writing, and eventually she found her voice as a poet.

## A Poet First

Writing *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* was a new kind of endeavor for Erika Sánchez, who had mostly written poetry in the past. In her poetry Sánchez uses lyricism to paint carefully crafted images. In her recently published book, *Lessons on Expulsion*, Sánchez paints images of young people growing up near the border in Mexico and young women traversing Chicago's many environments side by side. Descriptions of young women as they learn to deal with violence, sexism, and new experiences of sexuality are common throughout her poetry. In *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* Sánchez brings together many perspectives on what life is like for young people. The novel feels like an expansion of some of the moments captured in Sánchez's poetry and it similarly feels informed by her experience of growing up as a child of undocumented Mexican immigrants in Cicero.

**"I wanted to see myself in literature. As an avid reader, I looked everywhere. Where were all the messed-up Brown girls? Las malcriadas? The Latino weirdos?"**

## The Novel She Wished She Had

Sánchez's love of reading as a student led her to notice gaps in the works she had access to as a young person. She felt like she was unable to find very much in classic or young adult literature which reflected her own experiences back to her. She recalls "I wanted to see myself in literature. As an avid reader, I looked everywhere. Where were all the messed-up Brown girls? Las malcriadas? The Latino weirdos?" (Malcriada is a word in Spanish which can be translated as "badly raised girl". It can mean spoiled or pampered but it can also be used to say that there's something wrong or bad about someone's personality or way of being.) When she found Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* she loved it, but she felt like it was the only book she had which she could relate to. As well written as it was, it was also published the year she was born.

Sánchez's favorite writer is Toni Morrison, an author famous for writing about the historical experiences of Black women. One of Morrison's best known quotes is "If you find a book you really want to read but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." After going through a time of difficulty with her mental health and her career in writing and publishing, Sánchez came back to that quote and took it as inspiration. She remembered her desire to read books which reflected her contemporary lived experiences as a young person. And part of what was missing from that picture for her was an honest depiction of the struggles so many young women of color face.

**"If you find a book you really want to read but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it."**

**– Toni Morrison**

### **Honesty in Experience**

Sánchez wants *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* to be meaningful to everyone who reads it, but especially to young women of color. Sánchez said this about who she wanted her book to speak to: "Most important for me, I want young girls to feel like they matter. And that I see them. And that they are entitled to want more and to dream and to, you know, be who they are." The book includes experiences which can feel huge and insurmountable. From making decisions about sex, to understanding her family members' experiences of trauma, to dealing with serious mental health struggles, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* takes these big topics seriously and explores them fully.

The commitment to tackling all of these topics in one story seems to come from Sánchez's own sense that teen girls of color need stories which affirm that their lives and their struggles are normal and navigable, even if that might not feel true. Many topics she writes about in the book are related to real experiences she had as a teenager, and had to navigate without guidance. In creating the book she never had as a young person, Sánchez hopes to help young people who went through similar experiences as she did. She also hopes that learning through a character's journey can help people understand those experiences better even if they don't have them directly.

### **The Importance of Being Not Perfect**

Sánchez takes a lot of joy in her protagonist Julia's imperfections. When talking about her own experience, Sánchez said, "I think that's a common story for young women, that so much is expected of them, and we don't always want to live up to those expectations. Sometimes, we're not what our parents expected, at all."

**"Sometimes, we're not what our parents expected at all."**

Sánchez believes that an important part of telling stories to young people is telling stories which can reflect the complexity of their lives. Julia doesn't always respond to people in the most polite way, she sometimes makes unfair assumptions about people, and she often doesn't know how to handle her emotions. These qualities lead to relationship and communication challenges for Julia within the story, but they help readers relate to her through their own imperfections. Seeing Julia make mistakes and struggle but eventually figure out how to work through her challenges is one of the most effective ways Sánchez speaks to her readers about their own lives. At an event when asked what she wanted people to take away from this story she said this: "I just hope that, the way that I've been so influenced by books, ... others will be as well by my book. And I hope that even if it doesn't... change who they are as a person... it starts a conversation, or some sort of questioning..."

# I AM NOT YOUR PERFECT MEXICAN DAUGHTER

## SHOW SYNOPSIS

By Artistic Apprentice Brenna Barborka

1

Julia's sister, Olga dies after being hit by a semi-trailer truck while crossing the street. At the funeral, Julia stands at the casket and observes the body of her *hermana* while lamenting that Olga was the "perfect Mexican daughter" who never dreamt of anything more than her boring job and sitting at home with their *Amá* and *Apá*, their mother and father.

2

After the funeral, Julia sneaks into Olga's room. An apparition of Olga appears and directs Julia to Olga's hidden lingerie, a mysterious note that says, "I love you," and a room key to the Continental Hotel. *Amá* discovers Julia snooping in Olga's room and grounds her. The next day, *Amá* tells Julia that she is going to have a *quinceañera* even though she is already fifteen.

3

Julia visits the Continental and Olga's best friend Angie's house to look for answers, but comes up empty-handed at both. Disheartened, she cheers herself up by going to her best friend Lorena's house in hopes of distracting herself where she tries marijuana for the first time. The next day, *Amá* forces Julia to go to her little *primo's* birthday party. Julia causes a scene by mouthing off to her *padres* and her *tio* and gets in even more trouble.

4

Julia journals and eats lunch with Lorena and Lorena's friend Juanga (whom Julia has a hard time getting along with). That night, Julia goes to a party with Lorena and Juanga where she runs into Olga's childhood friend Jazmyn. Jazmyn lets slip that Olga was seeing someone when she died, which Julia believes might connect to the hidden items in Olga's room.

5

Julia decides to ask *Amá* about her *hermana's* boyfriend. *Amá* is upset by Julia's questions and ends up grounding Julia rather than believe that Olga had a secret *novio*. While Julia doesn't find consolation in her mother, she does find it at school in Mr. Ingman, Julia's *profesor* who teaches English—Julia's favorite subject. Julia reveals that she thinks Olga's death was her fault because she was the reason that Olga had to take the bus instead of getting picked up by *Amá*. Mr. Ingman tries to help Julia see that she had no control over Olga's death.

6

Under an immense amount of pressure and incredibly sleep-deprived, Julia blows up at Angie, *Amá*, and *Apá* during her *quinceañera*. Her punishment is to spend the summer cleaning houses with *Amá*. The only silver lining of the summer is that Julia meets Connor—a cute boy from Evanston who likes all the things that Julia does. The two start dating.

7

A year has passed since Olga's death and Julia still has no answers about the secrets Olga kept. Then, like magic, Julia finds the key to Olga's room in an old box of waffles. She sneaks into Olga's room and takes the lingerie, note, and hotel room key.

8

Julia and Connor get closer and become more intimate; they decide that they're ready to have sex. They both have a positive experience and discuss consent and protection. Julia experiences many different emotions afterwards and she's eager to talk to Lorena and Juanga about it the next day.

9

One day Julia returns home, and learns that *Amá* has gone through her journal and ripped out every page with a swear word. All of her entries, poems, and stories are gone. *Amá* also finds the lingerie, room key, and note. Julia is unable to tell her truth about these items –that they belonged to Olga, not her– so *Amá* takes her phone away, grounds her and locks her out of Olga's room.

10

After weeks of not having her phone, Connor breaks up with Julia because they can't communicate. Julia starts to spiral and becomes disconnected from everything—her friends, school, *Amá*, *Apá*, y *todo*. Unable to find joy, and still suffering from the loss of her sister, Julia is driven to attempt death by suicide. Her parents force her to seek psychiatric help and she bonds with Dr. Cooke. Unsure of how to help, Julia's *padres* tell her that she's visiting her *familia* in Mexico.

11

The night before Julia leaves, she gets into Olga's laptop and finds out she was seeing a married man with kids. She also finds an ultrasound and realizes that Olga was pregnant when she died. Julia boards a plane to Mexico with this secret. While there, her *abuela* tells her about her *padres* lives in Mexico and the hardships and violence they faced crossing the border to the states. Julia has a newfound appreciation for her life when she returns home.

12

Julia's college decision letters come in and she is disappointed to find that most of them are rejections. She is hopeless until she gets an acceptance letter from her dream school, NYU, which she decides to attend. When the time comes to move to New York, Julia bids her *Amá* y *Apá* farewell and, on the plane, meets a kind stranger who looks like Olga and is coincidentally also named Olga. Julia uses Olga's ultrasound as her bookmark and says, "How amazing is it... that I hold a piece of my sister right here in my hands?"

Here's an example of Erika L. Sánchez's poetry. This poem follows the story of a girl named Jacinta, a common name for girls which is the feminine form of the Spanish word for "Hyacinth." Take some time to notice how the themes in this poem connect to those in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* and Sánchez's personal experiences.

# Hyacinth

By Erika L. Sánchez

On the morning of Jacinta's birth, the air smelled animal. The blind rooster forever confused by the mysteries of light. After her final gasp of gratitude, Alondra wiped the slime from the baby's eyes and pierced her ears with golden spikes. *Soon she'll learn to swallow the cactus spines*, she murmured. As a girl, Jacinta spooned beans and swept dirt floors with sodden brooms. Her father, merchant of pigs, always speckled the flimsy horizon. Alondra grew inward: a bundle of rags and sticks in a corner, a cocoon of debris. On the rickety walls—ashen saints with their eyes rolled back in blessedness, whites the color of old wedding dresses. The scent of lard, cornhusks, and illness. When the news of her father's shame came on horseback, Jacinta covered her head with frayed linen and beat his bloody clothes against the river-rocks. What does it mean to forgive? For years she slapped her own face in the faded mirrors.

Once, a man strummed his broken guitar in the plaza as a hunchback whistled against a willow tree. It was there that Severo's gaze finally found her, covered her skin like tar. Under a clipped moon, his voice made one circle and then another, until Jacinta signed her name with the letter X on a wet and frigid morning. The poverty of love. Beads of blood. The children came like swarms of locusts: a constellation of sores on a baby's face, a womb marked by nothing. In meager times, haughty women bequeathed her leftovers filled with napkins and toothpicks—dregs from their finest feasts. The bloody egg was more than a bad omen, they said. That night the wind smelled like wet copper. The diseased mare brayed in the loud suck of mud, and in her winged loneliness, Jacinta severed her braids and begged for the threat of miracles.

## Questions to consider:

-  How does Erika L. Sánchez use imagery to tell us about Jacinta and the people in her life?
-  What does the imagery in the poem tell you about place, and how Jacinta's environment affects her?
-  How are there themes in this poem which relate to the themes of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*?

# FAMILIA O YO?

## A Classroom Activity

By Teaching Artist Sonya Madrigal and Education Apprentice Elon Sloan

45 mins



**ACTIVITY TIME:** 45 minutes, can be implemented before or after students see the play.

Throughout *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, Julia struggles with her relationship to family. She loves her parents, but she feels like she's not the daughter they wanted. She has pride in being Mexican, but she feels like other people use her Mexican identity to define her in ways that don't fit, and she avoids visiting her family in Mexico as a result. However, once she travels to visit her extended family, her perspective shifts and she realizes how much she doesn't know about her family's experience living in Mexico and crossing the border. The story she believed about how she and her family relate changes and becomes something new.

One metaphor that represents this change in Julia is hair braiding. Hair braids are an important part of Mexican culture and fashion. When Julia goes to visit her family in Mexico she remembers that one of her favorite things about her grandmother is that she braids her hair. Although in many ways she feels disconnected from her heritage, having her hair braided by her grandmother reminds her of the importance of her family and of Mexican culture in her life.

In this activity, students will think about a memory in their lives that weaves together like the three strands of a braid; in imagining this story, they will uncover new perspectives, just like Julia does in the play.

NAME:

### THE FIRST STRAND: YOUR STORY

Think about a memory of a time you faced a challenge relating to your family or your culture. Take a moment and write that story down from your perspective using the following "story ingredients":

- The story must include a sense of place: where were you when this memory took place? What can you remember about your surroundings?
- Your story should include at least one other person who was there when this moment occurred.
- Your telling of the story should allow the reader to know YOUR AGE. What details can you include about this memory to give the reader a sense of the storyteller's (YOUR) place in life?
- The story must utilize one of your senses: include a sound, smell, taste, etc. from something you remember from this memory.
- The story should be no longer than 5 sentences.

Here's an example from Julia's perspective:

#### The First Strand:

The fridge is empty, of course. The walls look dingy. It's the same kitchen where I've watched Amá and Olga put together meal after meal, for 15 years. I wish for the familiar smell of fresh tortillas, but in real life I just smell old dirty dishes. Now that this room has been empty for a week, it feels like I'm looking at the bright yellow walls through sunglasses. Honestly, the whole world seems to look a little bit sad since Olga died, so maybe it's me. But maybe it's that Amá, who used to clean the kitchen every day, has been in bed for two weeks. Could it really get this dirty this fast? "Amá," I shout, "I'm hungry!" Of course, I get no response.

## The First Strand:

## THE SECOND STRAND: THE OTHER PERSPECTIVE

Going back to the same story you just authored, think about how things happened from the perspective of someone else who experienced that same moment. Take a moment to take a step back from your feelings on the story to consider how this person was feeling in the moment. *Are they responding to the same thing that you are? Where do their emotions about the situation come from? How does this story make them feel about their family or culture?*

Using the same ingredients provided for strand one, write the story again from the point of view of the other person present during this moment.

Here's an example of the same story but this time from the perspective of Amá:

### *The Second Strand:*

I hate this bed, it feels like it's trying to swallow me. But my hands weigh more than my arms, and there's lead in my shoulders pinning me down into my pillow, and even though I'm being smothered by my itchy comforter, I'm so cold. I can hear Julia walking around, what has she gotten into? She's in that nasty kitchen. I'm 44 years old, how could I let my kitchen get like that? But how could Julia and my husband let my kitchen get like that? "Amá," Julia shouts, "I'm hungry!" It's so rude to shout at your mother like that. But I know I should have made dinner last night and cleaned this morning. I have...had... two daughters, not just one. I should be helping Julia, but how?

### The Second Strand:

## THE THIRD STRAND: A NEW STORY

Read back to yourself strands one and two. *Did you notice anything new writing the same story from a new perspective? What most sticks out to you about the differences between strand one and two?*

Now that you've thought about that same story in two different ways, we're going to braid them together to make something new.

Find a new and different standpoint to write altogether. You could write in third person or from the perspective of a new onlooker or from a different point of view. Focus on what sticks out to you about the story now that you've written it twice. *Can you write a new story that combines your viewpoint AND someone else's and creates something brand new?*

Use these new ingredients in your story:

- The story must include a character changing their physical space. *Consider: Knowing that place is so important in the first two stories, how does making a change to the space affect the conflict between characters?*
- The story must include a moment of care between the characters. *Think about some of the ways you take care of the people in your life even when you feel you can't necessarily relate to them.*

Here's an example of the final story Julia might have written using the ingredients for the third strand:

### *The Third Strand:*

Julia is in the kitchen, but it doesn't remind her of the bright place she watched her mother and sister nurse pots of beans and shape tortillas. Amá is in bed, but she can't relax or sleep soundly, like she used to after wearing through the days' cleaning. Her mind is in the kitchen, with the mess, with Julia, with Olga. Julia shouts that she's hungry, but Amá can't fix it. Amá can't get up. Julia peels back the covers that seem to weigh her mother down. She looks down at her mother. She tries to force a smile. "Take my purse," Amá says. It's all she can do. But at least she is able to do something.

### The Third Strand:

## Questions to consider:

-  Did completing the activity help you realize anything new about yourself or how you relate to your family or culture?
-  How did rewriting your story help you relate to Julia's journey in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*?
-  What differences did you notice between your stories? Was it hard to consider your memory from other viewpoints?

# YOU'RE ENTITLED TO YOUR EMOTIONS: GRIEF AND MENTAL ILLNESS IN *I AM NOT YOUR PERFECT MEXICAN DAUGHTER*

By Education Associate Abhi Shrestha

One of the most prominent questions in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* is: How do we cope with depression and grief amidst great personal loss? The story centers Julia, a 15-year-old Mexican-American teenager growing up in Chicago and navigating and exploring her own mental health after the death of her older sister. "I know mental illness is taboo, but I talk about my experiences [with mental illness] openly because I hope that they can help others. I want young people to know that it's okay to be mentally ill and that it's okay to ask for help," says the novel's author, Erika L. Sánchez. Julia's journey reminds us that we must talk openly and honestly about mental illness. If we hope to move this topic away from being taboo, we must acknowledge that it is okay to talk about our own mental health and grief. It is only through these conversations that we will be able to shed light on something that many of us, including Julia, deal with in different ways.

## IT'S COMPLICATED

The death of a loved one affects everyone differently. It is not uncommon for people go through several stages of grieving after losing someone close ranging from shock and denial to anger and bargaining to acceptance and hope. We see Julia go through several stages of grieving throughout her journey. For example, when Julia is at her quinceañera and has a moment of anger towards Olga's best friend Angie. When asked by her best friend if she's okay, Julia responds "No, Lorena. I'm not okay. Okay? I'm not, I'm not, I'm not." The guilt that Julia feels at various moments throughout the play is another stage of grief. This is clear when she is talking to her English teacher Mr. Ingman and mentions "...and I can't shake this feeling that, um. That I'm missing something... Sometimes I think it's my fault. That Olga's, um... that she's gone...?". Another sign of Julia navigating grief is her inability to sleep. It is common for individuals to have newfound insomnia when going through grief as they may have stressful thoughts about their loved ones that keep them up. On multiple occasions, Julia mentions her difficulty sleeping,

“ I haven't been able to sleep. My body is begging for rest but I just... can't fall asleep. Every time I close my eyes, she's right there. ”

The grief that Julia feels is totally normal, but it complicates many of her emotions and relationships with friends, family and loved ones. Though there is no specific timeline for grief, it is important to reflect on when grief can turn into depression. Dr. Michael Miller, an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, notes that with both grief and depression, "People cry. They feel depressed. [They have] trouble sleeping. They may not have an appetite. They may not feel like doing anything. They may not take pleasure in anything." All these symptoms we see Julia navigating on her journey.

Grief and depression can look very similar and often overlap according to Dr. Miller. He acknowledges "the death of a significant other can be the catalyst that brings depression to the foreground." With Julia, we see how the death of Olga heightens the stress she feels as the daughter of immigrants and amplifies the loneliness she feels, ultimately leading to her suicide attempt in the play. When Julia speaks to Dr. Cooke after the attempt, she describes the deep well of emotions that have been accumulating, and the depression that she's been navigating:

“ It's like... how can I explain...first, my sister dies, which has been a living hell. And... there's so much I want to do, but can't. The life I want seems impossible, and it just gets so... frustrating. ”



## YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Julia is juggling a lot of responsibilities and expectations in this story. While grieving the loss of her sister, she still has to apply for colleges, go to school, work with her mom, have a quinceañera that she doesn't want, navigate her first sexual experience, and so much more. A report from the U.S. Surgeon General notes that "one in five children and adolescents will face a significant mental health condition during their school years." Today's teenagers are facing higher stress and anxiety rates than any other generation, leading to a notable increase of teen suicide rates in the U.S.

These rates are even higher among young Latinas in America. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, 10.5% of Latina adolescents aged 10–24 years in the U.S. attempted death by suicide in 2017. Unfortunately, conversations around depression and mental illness are often taboo, especially in communities of color. This lack of dialogue accompanied by a lack of resources and access to health care exacerbates issues surrounding mental health for young people of color. While Julia does speak about her depression, it's never with her family. For example, Julia mentions "I feel so lonely that I don't know what to do with myself. I usually wait till my parents fall asleep and then I just bawl my eyes out."

*What are the underlying reasons Julia doesn't have an honest conversation about her loneliness with her parents?*

## NO SHAME IN TALKING

As Dr. Cooke reminds Julia; "You're entitled to your emotions. There shouldn't be any shame in that." And that's true, there shouldn't be any shame in talking about our mental health. The first step towards addressing the mental health issues in high school settings, and in general, is understanding them on a deeper level. It's important to look at Julia's story and think about how her story might be different if she was able to have more transparent conversations about her mental well-being. But talking about it is only the first step, many of the issues around mental illness require professional support like any other illness. We see positive change in Julia's life after her visit with Dr. Cooke, starting anti-depression and anti-anxiety medications, and beginning therapy.

Sánchez hopes, "people can learn from what I've gone through and see that recovery is possible." Let's allow Julia's journey to inform our work to destigmatize conversations around grief and mental health as we work together to address mental health the best we can.

## RESOURCES

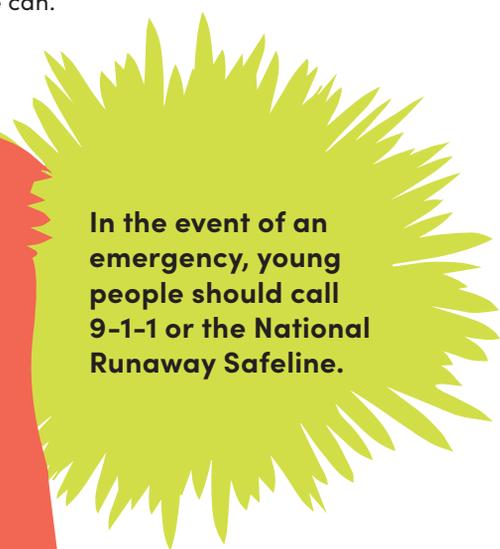
Steppenwolf Education works in partnership with licensed social workers from Primo Center for Women and Children, Chicago Children's Center for Behavioral Health, and Communities In Schools of Chicago. Social workers will be present at each school performance of the show. Please contact Education Associate Abhi Shrestha ([ashrestha@steppenwolf.org](mailto:ashrestha@steppenwolf.org)) for more information about these organizations and how to connect with them.

Youth in need of professional help should seek out of one of these resources:

**Mujeres Latinas in Acción**  
[mujereslatinasenaccion.org](http://mujereslatinasenaccion.org) | 773.890.7676

**National Runaway Safeline**  
[1800runaway.org/youth-teens](http://1800runaway.org/youth-teens) | 1.800.786.2929

**Youth Outreach Services**  
[yos.org/services/counseling](http://yos.org/services/counseling) | 773.777.7112



**In the event of an emergency, young people should call 9-1-1 or the National Runaway Safeline.**

# BEST SELF BAILE

## A Classroom Activity

By Teaching Artist Wilfredo Ramos Jr.

45 mins



**ACTIVITY TIME:** 45 minutes; to be implemented after students see the play.

When Julia' "perfect" sister, Olga, dies unexpectedly in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, Julia experiences a lot of pressure from her parents to be like her sister and to play the role of a "Perfect Mexican Daughter" who cooks, cleans, and obeys her parents. But Julia is not her sister and Olga's footsteps aren't ones Julia wants to follow.

In this activity, students will explore how they can step away from the version of SELF others want them to be and into the SELF they want to be.

### STEP ONE – BECOMING JULIA

5 mins



Have students read the following passage from *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* aloud. Read the passage at least twice. Each time invite a different reader to read the passage.

*JULIA*

*Remember all the times Amá and Apá sent us to Mexico? Those were the best times, huh? I can still hear your laugh. I can still feel the sun on our cheeks. I can feel your arm around my neck, whispering in my ear, telling me to enjoy this for Amá and Apá since they'll never get to come back here. The sacrifices they made bringing us to Chicago. Leaving their entire world behind. Is that why you never left?*

*You were so much better than me.*

*Cleaning...*

*Cooking...*

*The perfect daughter.*

*The perfect Mexican daughter.*

### STEP TWO – IMAGINING "PERFECT"

5 mins



Ask students to take a moment to imagine a role that someone else has cast them in. For Julia, that role is Perfect Mexican Daughter. For someone else, that role could be Honor Student, Church Youth Leader, "Mother" to Younger Siblings, Teacher's Pet, Bossy Older Sister, Tagalong Little Brother, Confidant, Pianist, Gamer or anything else they can imagine. Whatever roles they choose, have students make sure that the roles are ones that other people have chosen for them and that they feel comfortable talking about their choices with their peers. Once students have thought of a role, have them write their responses on a piece of paper.

Now, have students name three habits that they think a perfect "-----" consistently practices. Remind students: *These habits don't need to be ones that you currently practice. Just based on your own knowledge and experience, what does a perfect "-----" do?* Once students have thought of three habits, have them write them down.

Example: For Julia, a Perfect Mexican Daughter...

- 1) Cleans
- 2) Cooks
- 3) Obeys her parents

Once students have thought of three habits of a role someone else has cast them in, have them write them down on the same piece of paper.

## STEP THREE – IMAGINING FUTURE SELVES

5 mins



Now, have each student think of a role that they would cast for themselves. The roles students choose should be ones that they aspire to play someday. If Julia were doing this exercise, she might cast herself as a Famous Writer. Perhaps for someone else that is a Model Student or a Winning Poet or a Fabulous Painter. Ask students: *What role would you cast for yourself?* Have them write their responses on the same piece of paper.

Invite students to name at least three habits that they think a person in their chosen role practices. Have students write their ideas on the same piece of paper.

Example: For Julia, a Famous Writer might...

- 1) Always carry a notebook and pen
- 2) Remember the littlest details to add to a future story
- 3) Engage with people in all different settings as fodder for new characters

## STEP FOUR – MOVEMENT PRACTICE

15 mins



Invite students to rise to their full heights according to their individual abilities. For this portion of the activity, the facilitator has the option to have students complete the following tasks wherever they are or gather the group in a circle.

Guide your students with the following prompts. Feel free to add, adjust, or remove prompts as you are inspired.

### Centering Prompts (2 minutes)

- Take a breath.
- Notice where your attention is right now. Is it here with you in this moment? Is it somewhere else?
- Take another breath. As you breathe, let go of anything else on your mind and bring your attention to this moment.
- Notice how you feel in your body right now. What feels comfortable? What feels uncomfortable?
- Take another breath.
- Take a stretch for yourself to help you get more comfortable.
- Take another breath.
- Anytime you start to lose focus, feel free to take a breath and come back to this centering pose.

### Sequence One: Becoming “Perfect” Prompts (5 minutes)

- Remember the role that someone else chose for you. Remember one of the habits that a person in this role does. Create a gesture or movement to represent this habit. This movement should be one that you can repeat.

*Example: Julia might kneel and move her hand in a circle over the floor to show how she thinks a Perfect Mexican Daughter cleans.*

- Create a gesture or movement for a second habit.
- Create a gesture or movement for a third habit.
- Create a word or sound that expresses how you feel in this role.

*Example: Julia might groan each time she bends down to kneel.*

- Combine all three movements and your sound into a single sequence. Pay attention to how you move from one movement to the next. Pay attention to your breath. *Before students combine their movements, this is an opportunity for you to model an example.*
- Remember your sequence and let it go.

### Sequence Two: Becoming Our Future Selves (5 minutes)

- Remember the role that you chose for yourself. Remember one of the habits a person in this role does. Create a gesture or movement to represent this habit. This movement should be one that you can repeat

*Example: Julia, as the Famous Writer might pretend to write in a notebook.*

- Create a gesture or movement for a second habit.
- Create a gesture or movement for a third habit.
- Create a word or sound that expresses how you feel in this role.

*Example: Julia might laugh.*

- Combine all three movements and your sound into a single sequence. Pay attention to how you move from one movement to the next. Play attention to your breath. *Before students combine their movements, this is an opportunity for you to model an example.*

### From First to Second Sequence (3 minutes)

- Remember your first sequence.
- Practice transitioning from your first sequence to your second sequence at least twice.
- Breathe, and let your dances go.

## STEP FIVE – CAN I HAVE THIS DANCE?

15 mins



Invite students to form pairs, or to find a “dance partner.” Have partners introduce themselves. Once all students are paired up, invite partners to take turns sharing their sequences, one at a time.

Once all pairs have shared their sequences, invite partners to discuss the following: *What differences did you notice between the first and the second sequences? What connections can you make between your sequences? How did it feel to embody and witness each other’s sequences?*

Invite the full group to discuss the following: *What actions can we and other people take to help us live more authentically in our bodies?*