

ESL M13/913: Academic Reading and Writing III

Reading

In this class, we read the young readers' edition of the novel, [*The Distance Between Us*](#) by Reyna Grande.

Writing

Here is a sample of the kind of writing assignment you can expect in this class. If you can write this type of essay easily, go to the next higher class. Remember, you will have a tutor and teacher working with you.

ESL M13/913 Writing Prompt:

Your final essay assignment will be to write a **5-paragraph argument essay** about a topic related to *The Distance Between Us*. You must include quotes from the book and evidence from research in your essay. Select ONE (1) of the following topics:

- Reyna has a difficult time adjusting to life in the US. After reading more about her experiences, do you think that moving to the US was the right choice? Explain why or why not. (research: culture shock, immigrant assimilation)
- Reyna, Mago, and Carlos want to have their parents in their lives, but Mami and Papi are not ideal parents. Do you think that the children are in a better situation with Papi or Mami? Explain your answer with clear reasons. (research: neglectful parenting, abusive parenting, generational trauma)
- At the start of the story, Mami and Papi move to the US without their children. Do you agree that Mami and Papi made the right choice to immigrate without their children? Explain why or why not. (research: left behind children, parental migration)
- When Mami leaves, she asks Mago to be "the little mother." Do you agree with Mami's decision to make Mago into "the little mother" for Reyna and Carlos? Explain why or why not. (research: parentification)

Student Model:

Papi is a Better Parent than Mami

In the book, *The Distance Between Us*, Grande explains how Mago, Carlos, and Reyna want to live with their parents; however, Mami and Papi are not ideal parents. Mami abandons the children for boyfriends, and she only worries about herself. She is also unstable and does not visit her children often. Papi is an aggressive and abusive alcoholic who beats his children. On the other hand, Mami spends time doing fun activities with the children and takes them out of the house while Papi is a more consistent parent that cares for the children's basic needs. Even though Papi is not an ideal parent, he is the best parental figure for the children because he brings them to the US to have more opportunities and he is more financially stable.

First, Papi is the best parental figure for Mago, Reyna, and Carlos because he brings them to the US to have more opportunities. When they first arrive to the US, Grande comments, “To others, Papi’s apartment may have seemed small, but to us, after living in a one-room shack with Abuelita Chinta and my uncle, it was a palace...it had thick solid walls that made me feel safe and protected in a way I’d never felt before” (149). This quote shows that the children feel more secure in Papi’s house than in their old house in Mexico. Their living situation is much better because they can sleep in a stable, well-built home that will not flood and does not contain any scorpions. Even though the children love Abuelita Chinta, Reyna feels more protected in Papi’s house than her shack. Research shows that, “For many Latinos, the United States offers a chance at a better life...Majorities also say that the US has better conditions for raising kids, access to health care and treatment of the poor, according to a Pew Research Center national survey of 3,375 Latino adults conducted in March 2021” (Lopez and Moslimani). In other words, most Latino immigrants believe that their children will have better living conditions and access to resources in the United States. Papi also agrees with this idea, and he brings his children to the US so they can benefit from the opportunities in this country. In sum, Papi works hard so his children can live better lives in California.

Second, Papi is a better parent because he is more financially stable than Mami. Grande explains, “Mila and Papi owned a four-plex apartment building on Granada Street” (149). “Mami lived in a tiny room big enough for a bed, a dining table, a refrigerator, a TV stand, and boxes of clothes piled against the wall” (212). These quotes indicate that Papi owns real estate and even makes money by renting apartments to other people. He, Mila, and the children live in a one-bedroom apartment with basic amenities, such as a shower, bathroom, and kitchen. On the other hand, Mami lives in a tiny room with her new husband and two children. She has to share a bathroom with other people in her building. It will be difficult for Mago, Carlos, and Reyna to live in this situation with Mami. Research also shows that, “Children are more likely to face mental health problems if they grow up in a family that is low income or has significant debt” (Abrams). This means that Mago, Carlos, and Reyna might develop emotional problems if they live with Mami because she is low income. It will be stressful for them to live in a room with four other people. It is better for the children to stay with Papi. In sum, Papi is more financially stable, so he is the best choice for parenting the children.

Some might argue that Mami is a better parent because she spends a lot of time with the children in Mexico, and she comes

back to them before Papi. These critics explain, “She now visited us on Sundays” (102). “Mami said, ‘Let’s go to el zocalo’” (96). These quotes show that Mami visits the children and does fun activities with them. It is true that Mami spends some time with the children, however, she only visits only once a week, and this is not enough to be a present parent. Also, after a while, Mami abandons the children and allows them to leave Mexico with Papi. To illustrate, Mami’s brother tells her, “‘You aren’t taking care of them, Juana...Let them go, Juana. It’s for the best...’Fine,’ Mami said at last to my uncle. ‘If they want to go with him, so be it.’” (123). In other words, Mami’s brother can see that Mami does not care about the children. She allows them to leave Mexico with their father and does not show any emotion when they leave. She does not tell them she loves them or that she will miss them. In sum, while Mami might show the children some attention, she is not the best parent for them.

Papi is a better parent than Mami because he cares about his children’s future and provides for them financially. Mami spends some time with Mago, Carlos, and Reyna, but she is not a stable parent. She always expects other people to care for the children. Papi is not perfect, but he provides a stable home for the children and encourages them to do well in school. I predict that the children will have a close relationship with Papi because they are happy to live with him. However, they will have a distant relationship with Mami because she abandons them.

Works Cited

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- Grande, Reyna. *The Distance Between Us: Young Readers Edition*. Aladdin, 2017.
- Lopez, Mark and Mohamad Moslimani. “Latinos see US as Better than Place of Family’s Ancestry for Opportunity, Raising Kids, Health Care Access.” *Pew Research Center*, 20 Jan. 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/race-ethnicity/2022/01/20/latinos-see-u-s-as-better-than-place-of-familys-ancestry-for-opportunity-raising-kids-health-care-access/>. Accessed 16 April 2024.