

ONE MARYLAND ONE BOOK 2014

READER'S GUIDE



*The Distance
Between Us*

*A Memoir
Reyna Grande*

IMAGINE IF EVERYONE READ THE SAME BOOK AT THE SAME TIME

WHAT NEW THINGS WOULD WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT WITH EACH OTHER?

In its seventh year, One Maryland One Book remains Maryland's only statewide community reading program. It brings together diverse people in communities across the state through a shared experience: the reading and thoughtful discussion of the same book. This year's book selection was guided by the theme of "the American Dream." The Maryland Center for the Book at the Maryland Humanities Council partners with public libraries, high schools, colleges and universities, museums, bookstores, correctional facilities and other organizations to bring book centered discussions and other related events to communities across Maryland.

The Maryland Humanities Council has at the core of its mission a deep commitment to provide Marylanders with an opportunity to gather and discuss issues important to their lives and communities, believing that a great work of literature provides an excellent springboard to do so. One Maryland One Book is not just about reading or literature, though; it is also about bringing people together for meaningful dialogue.

The book selected for 2014 is *The Distance Between Us: A Memoir* by Reyna Grande.

GET THE BOOK

Pick up a copy of *The Distance Between Us* at your local public library or bookstore and start a conversation with your family, friends, coworkers, or even the person sitting next to you as you ride the bus or train. This is your chance to take a moment to have a great conversation with friends old or new.

JOIN IN

We invite you to join our Honorary Chair, Maryland First Lady Katie O'Malley, and thousands of other Marylanders at one of the many book discussions and related events happening around the state in September and October.

If you're out and about, you might find copies of *The Distance Between Us* in unexpected places. Our Wandering Books can be found in public spaces such as parks, buses, malls, county fairs, and doctor's offices. If you find a copy, it's yours for a short time. Register the book online so we can see how far it travels (instructions are included with the book). Read it, review it, and then release it for someone else to enjoy.

To find One Maryland One Book programs in your area, go to www.onemarylandonebook.org and click on the Calendar.

For all the latest information, "Like" or Follow us:



Look for Reyna Grande at venues across the state in late September, including the Baltimore Book Festival on Sunday, September 28.



Scan this code with your smartphone to hear Reyna Grande read the Prologue of *The Distance Between Us*.

LETTER FROM HONORARY CHAIR MARYLAND FIRST LADY KATIE O'MALLEY



Thank you for joining me and the Maryland Humanities Council for One Maryland One Book, our state's community reading project. Reading is a solitary pursuit—yet each year thousands of Marylanders become a part of something much bigger. They enjoy reading the same great book, selected by a devoted group of enthusiastic volunteers, and then take time to gather as a group and talk about the book and how it relates to their lives. If you're new to this program, welcome! If you've had the pleasure of reading along with us in years past, welcome back.

This year's book, *The Distance Between Us*, offers access to a very personal, modern immigration story. Ms. Grande's story is unique, yet universal. In the book, she recounts her challenges and experiences before and after entering this country as an undocumented immigrant. She gained legal status after a few years, during the amnesty program offered during the administration of President Ronald Reagan. As she states frankly, she just wanted to be with her father. For her and her siblings, that meant coming to the United States, but the journey and subsequent acclimation were arduous. Her story will resonate with many in Maryland, which is home to more than 800,000 immigrants—that's nearly 1 in 7 Marylanders—and will offer new insights for many others. Seeking the American Dream has been the motivation of those from near and far for centuries. As a nation built in part through the strength and perseverance of those who came here from other countries, we find ourselves today looking to continue the important discussion of what each of us can contribute to the success of a nation.

We encourage you to pick up a copy of *The Distance Between Us* and join the conversation. A program of the Maryland Humanities Council's Maryland Center for the Book, One Maryland One Book is made possible each year through the generosity of our sponsors and community partners. We greatly thank them for their support. Find out how to get involved at www.onemarylandonebook.org.

Sincerely,

Katie O'Malley
First Lady of Maryland

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



photo by Imran Chaudhry

Reyna Grande is an award-winning novelist and memoirist. She has received an American Book Award, the El Premio Aztlán Literary Award, and the Latino Book Award. In 2012 she was a finalist for the prestigious National Book Critics Circle Awards. Her works have been published internationally in countries such as Norway and South Korea.

Born in Mexico, Grande was two years old when her father left for the U.S. to find work. Her mother followed her father north two years later, leaving her and her siblings behind in Mexico. In 1985, when Grande was nearly ten, she entered the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant. She went on to become the first person in her family to graduate from college.

After attending Pasadena City College for two years, Grande obtained a B.A. in creative writing and film and video from the University of California, Santa Cruz. She later received her M.F.A. in creative writing from Antioch University. Now, in addition to being a published author, she is also an active promoter of Latino literature and is a sought-after speaker at high schools, colleges, and universities across the nation.

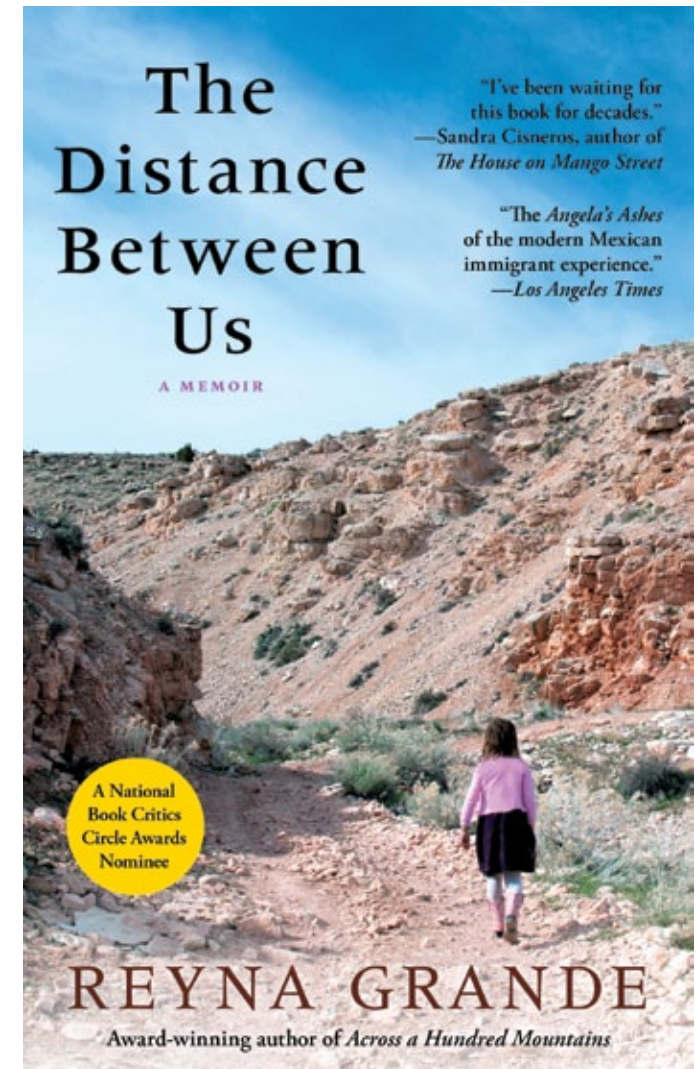
Her novels, *Across a Hundred Mountains* (Atria, 2006) and *Dancing with Butterflies* (Washington Square Press, 2009), were published to critical acclaim and have been read widely in schools across the country. A National Book Circle Critics Award finalist, *The Distance Between Us* was hailed by the *Los Angeles Times* as "the Angela's Ashes of the modern Mexican immigrant experience."

Currently Grande teaches creative writing at UCLA Extension and is at work on her next novel. Learn more at www.reynagrande.com.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Reyna Grande vividly brings to life her tumultuous early years in this "compelling....unvarnished, resonant" (*Book Page*) story of a childhood spent torn between two parents and two countries. As her parents make the dangerous trek across the Mexican border to "El Otro Lado" (The Other Side) in pursuit of the American dream, Reyna and her siblings are forced into the already overburdened household of their stern grandmother. When their mother at last returns, Reyna prepares for her own journey to "El Otro Lado" to live with the man who has haunted her imagination for years, her long-absent father.

Heartbreaking and lyrical, *The Distance Between Us* poignantly captures the confusion and contradictions of childhood, reminding us that the joys and sorrows we experienced are imprinted on the heart forever, calling out to us of those places we first called home.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Was there ever a time when you felt abandoned or left behind by a loved one or someone close to you? Were you able to resolve your feelings?
- 2 Is anyone truly looking out for the well-being of Reyna, Mago and Carlos? If so, who and how? Is it that the adults don't care or are they doing the best they can given the circumstances?
- 3 What toll does the separation from their parents take on Reyna, Mago and Carlos (and Betty)?
- 4 Have you ever had to face challenging times similar to the Grande-Rodriguez family? Do you know anyone who has?
- 5 What impacts do the relationships of Juana and Natalio (including their new spouses) have on their children?
- 6 The children often feel like outsiders, both in Mexico and in the United States. Why do they feel so isolated?
- 7 Are you or any close family or friends from another country? What were the challenges upon their arrival in America?
- 8 Does your family have any cultural traditions that you remember growing up and have you continued and/or passed them along to the younger generations of your family?
- 9 Have you ever experienced the “distance” in relationships that Reyna talks about throughout the book? Why do you think she and her family weren't able to overcome it?
- 10 Did Reyna, her siblings or her parents achieve the American Dream? Do you think *they* feel they achieved the American Dream?



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Each year we hope that your participation in One Maryland One Book inspires you to keep talking about the many thought-provoking topics examined in the selected book. The following list of books and movies might be of interest after reading *The Distance Between Us*. We encourage you to continue your exploration!

BOOKS

The World of Mexican Immigrants: The Rock and the Hard Place by Judith Adler Hellman

Learn about the lives of Mexican immigrants to the United States through Judith Hellman's in-depth interviews as she explores several themes including the journey here and the dilemma of whether to stay or return home. (Nonfiction)

How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents by Julia Alvarez

This tale of four sisters who, in fleeing for their lives from the dictator Trujillo, leave a life of privilege in the Dominican Republic behind for New York City. The culture shock to all in the family, including the girls' parents, is the basis of the story.

The Guardians: A Novel by Ana Castillo

Eking out a living as a teacher's aide in a small New Mexico border town, Tía Regina is also raising her teenage nephew, Gabo, a hardworking boy who has entered the country illegally and aspires to the priesthood. Regina fears the worst when Gabo's father, Rafa, disappears while crossing from Mexico.

The Last of the Menu Girls by Denise Chávez

The character of Rocio Esquibel, as a child, young woman, teacher, and aspiring writer, gives unity to this collection of seven related stories set in New Mexico. This is a celebration of Chicano culture and a universal story of finding one's way in the world.

Caramelo by Sandra Cisneros

Every year, Lala Reyes' family—aunts, uncles, mothers, fathers, and Lala's six older brothers—packs up three cars and, in a wild ride, drive from Chicago to the Little Grandfather and Awful Grandmother's house in Mexico City for the summer. Through the eyes of young Lala, the Reyes family saga twists and turns over three generations of truths, half-truths, and outright lies.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by Junot Díaz

Oscar dreams of being an author as renowned as JRR Tolkien. He's hampered by his obesity, lack of social skills, and his status as a first-generation Dominican-American, as well as a longstanding family curse. This novel offers a multi-generational perspective on the immigrant experience in America.

Learning to Die in Miami: Confessions of a Refugee Boy by Carlos Eire

A continuation of his 2003 National Book Award-winning *Waiting for Snow in Havana*, *Learning to Die in Miami* opens as the plane lands and Carlos faces his new life with trepidation and excitement. He quickly realizes that in order for his new American self to emerge, his Cuban self must “die.” And so, with great enterprise and purpose, he begins his journey. (Nonfiction)

BOOKS (cont.)

Dreaming in Cuban by Christina García

García weaves a tale of Cubans in exile and at odds with themselves throughout this novel. The family is challenged by distance (Havana to New York City) as well as their systems of beliefs, mental instability, and generational differences.

Growing Up Ethnic in America: Contemporary Fiction About Learning to Be An American Edited by Maria Mazziotti Gillan and Jennifer Gillan

Thirty-five writers, including Amy Tan, Toni Morrison, Sherman Alexie, and Helena Maria Viramontes, give voice to the many ways individuals from distinctly ethnic backgrounds come to terms with living in the U.S.

A Map of Home: A Novel by Randa Jarrar

This coming-of-age tale follows a spirited Muslim girl named Nidali from babyhood to the brink of college, through sexual awakening and birth as a creative writer. Nidali's primary influences are the cultures she absorbs from living with an Egyptian-Greek mother and a Palestinian father in Kuwait, Egypt, and the U.S.

Girl in Translation by Jean Kwok

After 11-year-old Kimberly, a.k.a. Ah-Kim, emigrates from Hong Kong to Brooklyn with her mother, her "knack for school" offers an escape route from a world of poverty and secret factory labor. Some elements of the old life, though—including a romantic attachment—follow her into the new.

Fifteen Candles: 15 Tales of Taffeta, Hairspray, Drunk Uncles, and Other Quinceañera Stories Edited by Adriana Lopez

In this anthology, fifteen writers share affectionate, funny, and sometimes irreverent personal stories about this rite of passage that celebrates a Latina's fifteenth birthday. (Nonfiction)

Hijas Americanas: Beauty, Body Image, and Growing Up Latina by Rosie Molinary

Molinary draws on interviews with more than five hundred Latina participants to shed new light on and explore the diversity of the Latina experience. (Nonfiction)

Enrique's Journey: the Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother by Sonia Nazario

Based on the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper series that won two Pulitzer Prizes, this story puts a human face on the ongoing debate about immigration reform in the United States. It is a powerful, moving story about a Honduran boy traveling through hostile circumstances to reach his mother in the United States. (Nonfiction)

Latino in America by Soledad O'Brien with Rose Marie Arce

Traveling to big cities and small towns, O'Brien documents the diverse lives and experiences of Latinos in America. This is the companion book to the series aired on the CNN network. (Nonfiction)

The Line of the Sun by Judith Ortiz Cofer

Marisol is the American niece of Guzman, the wild child of his Puerto Rican village. She is fascinated by his mystique and narrates his story as he learns to negotiate life in a big American city. Never quite sure what is dreamed, remembered, or made up, Ortiz Cofer provides a lyrical ride through a world of magical realism.

Antonio's Gun and Delfino's Dream: True Tales of Mexican Migration by Sam Quinones

Quinones, who lived in Mexico for ten years as a freelance journalist, writes vividly about the individual experiences of Mexican immigrants to America. (Nonfiction)

The Death of Josseline: Immigration Stories from the Arizona-Mexico Borderlands by Margaret Regan

Unorthodox in her approach, Regan looks at the problem of undocumented immigrants from both perspectives, hiding out with desperate migrants and securing the border with members of the Border Patrol. (Nonfiction)

From Every End of This Earth: 13 Families and the New Lives They Made in America by Steven V. Roberts

Have you ever wondered what it is like to be an immigrant in contemporary America? Follow along with author Steven V. Roberts as he meets immigrants from places such as Afghanistan, China, Mexico, and Sierra Leone. (Nonfiction)

The Madonnas of Echo Park by Brandon Skyhorse

From a housecleaner who befriends her depressed employer to a bus driver who denies his responsibility for a rider's death, a rich array of Mexican-American characters, people with linked lives in a Los Angeles neighborhood, emerge one by one in story-like chapters.

There's No José Here: Following the Hidden Lives of Mexican Immigrants by Gabriel Thompson

Thompson's book focuses on the experiences of Enrique, an illegal immigrant from Mexico, struggling to make a life for himself and his family in a new world that he doesn't completely understand. (Nonfiction)

Into the Beautiful North by Luis Alberto Urrea

Since their Mexican village is running out of men to defend it from drug-dealing gangsters, 19-year-old Nayeli and three friends undertake an imaginative mission, to enter America illegally for the sake of recruiting Mexican men and bringing them home. Along the way, Nayeli hopes to reunite with her father, who "traded his family for a job."

YOUNG ADULTS

Sammy and Juliana in Hollywood by Benjamin Alire Sáenz

It is 1969, America is at war, "Hollywood" is a dirt-poor Chicano barrio in small-town America, and Sammy and Juliana face a world of racism, war in Vietnam, and barrio violence. In the summer before his senior year, Sammy falls in love with the beautiful, independent, and intensely vulnerable Juliana. Sammy's chronicle of his senior year is both a love story and a litany of loss, the tale of his love not only for Juliana but for their friends—a generation from a barrio: tough, innocent, humorous, and determined to survive.

Mexican WhiteBoy by Matt de la Peña

Set in San Diego County's alleys and baseball fields, Danny must confront issues of family, friendship, and acceptance along with figuring out his identity in this coming of age story.

House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

Told in a series of vignettes—sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous—*House on Mango Street* is the story of a young Latina girl growing up in Chicago, inventing for herself who and what she will become.

The Red Umbrella by Christina Diaz Gonzalez

The Red Umbrella is the moving tale of a 14-year-old girl's journey from Cuba to America as part of Operation Pedro Pan—an organized exodus of more than 14,000 unaccompanied children, whose parents sent them away to escape Fidel Castro's revolution.

CHILDREN

From North to South by Rene Colato Lainez

José loves helping Mamá in the garden outside their home in California. But when Mamá is sent back to Mexico for not having citizenship papers, José and his Papá face an uncertain future. José and his father travel from San Diego to visit her in Tijuana. Ages 6-8

Lucha Libre: The Man in the Silver Mask: A Bilingual Cuento by Xavier Garza

When Carlitos attends a wrestling match in Mexico City with his father, his favorite masked wrestler has eyes that are strangely familiar. Ages 9-12

Armando and the Blue Tarp School by Edith Hope Fine

Armando's family are trash pickers, living off things they can use, recycle, and sell from the city trash dump. Armando works with his father to help support the family, but he also finds things for himself—pencil stubs, a notebook, and an old paint set—with which to write and paint. One summer, Señor David arrives and begins teaching school on a blue tarp spread on the ground. Inspired by a true story. Ages 6-9

Becoming Naomi León by Pam Muñoz Ryan

When Naomi's mother resurfaces after seven years to reclaim her from her loving great-grandmother, Naomi runs away to Mexico in search of her father. Ages 9-12



FILM

Bless Me, Ultima (2012, 106 min., rated PG-13)—Directed by Carl Franklin

Based on the novel by Rudolfo Anaya, the film is set in New Mexico during WWII. This drama focuses on the relationship between a young man and an aged medicine woman who helps him forge his own identity. It is also the 2013 Imagen Foundation Award winner for Best Feature Film.

Crossing Arizona (2008, 75 min., unrated)—Directed by Dan Devivo and Joseph Mathew

With the influx of migrants crossing the border through Arizona, this film focuses on the highly debated, politically charged issue and the response from humanitarian groups, political activists, farmers, and citizen patrol groups.

Destination Mexico (2002, 104 min., unrated)—Directed by Pilot Films

Part of the Globe Trekker Series, experience the culture and visit the ancient ruins of Mexico's big cities.

Farmingville (2004, 78 min., unrated)—Directed by Catherine Tambini and Carlos Sandoval

Winner of the Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, this documentary provides a look into the ongoing and emotionally-charged nationwide controversy surrounding a suburban community, its ever-expanding population of illegal immigrants, and the shocking hate-based attempted murders of two Mexican day laborers.

Quinceañera (2006, 90 min., rated R)—Directed by Richard Glatzer and Wash Westmoreland

As Magdalena's 15th birthday approaches, her simple, blissful life is complicated by the discovery that she's pregnant. Kicked out of her house, she finds a new family with her great-granduncle and black sheep cousin. This film won the Grand Jury Prize and the Audience Award at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival.

Sin Nombre (2009, 96 min., rated R)—Directed by Cary Fukunaga

Winner of twelve awards including, 2009 Cinematography and Directing Awards from Sundance, *Sin Nombre* is the story of a teenage Honduran girl who befriends a Mexican gang member who helps to smuggle her family into the United States.

Under the Same Moon (2007, 110 min., rated PG-13)—Directed by Patricia Riggen

After the death of his grandmother, Carlitos leaves Mexico in search of his mother, Rosario, who works illegally in the United States to support him.

Which Way Home (2009, 83 min., unrated)—Directed by Rebecca Cammisa

This documentary follows several child migrants on their journey from Mexico to the United States in search of their families. The film was nominated in 2010 for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature and won the 2010 Emmy for Outstanding Informational Programming, Long Form.



NOTES



The content and resources of this guide were created and compiled with the assistance of the staff of the Enoch Pratt Free Library. Portions have been reprinted with permission from Simon & Schuster.

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The Maryland Humanities Council is an educational nonprofit organization. Our mission is to stimulate and promote informed dialogue and civic engagement on issues critical to Marylanders via the humanities. To learn more, visit www.mdhc.org.



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