Steppenwolf for Young Adults

*I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*

An Audio Adaptation  
Based on the novel by Erika L. Sánchez  
Audio & original stage adaptation by Isaac Gómez  
Co-directed by Ensemble Members Sandra Marquez and Audrey Francis  
Streaming from: April 26 - August 29, 2021

STUDY GUIDE

Welcome to *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*

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*I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*

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Welcome to *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, an audio adaptation

Dear students and teachers,

We were heartbroken to cut short our run of last season’s stage production due to the pandemic but are honored to bring this story back to not only teens in Chicago, but also to so many new students across the world via our virtual platform.

Erika Sánchez’s prolific novel, on which Isaac Gómez’s stage and audio adaptations are based,follows the journey of Julia as she navigates the trials and tribulations of being a young Mexican girl in Chicago coping with the tragic death of her older sister, Olga – the epitome of the perfect Mexican daughter. When Julia discovers a not-so-simple secret left behind the wake of her sister’s death, she discovers that Olga was, perhaps, not so perfect after all.

Gómez and the team have re-visited the piece to update and re-vamp for the audio format, bringing you a whole new version of Julia’s story. We are thrilled to be collaborating with Gómez, along with Steppenwolf Ensemble members Sandra Marquez (co-director), Audrey Francis (co-director), and Karen Rodriguez (Julia) to bring Sánchez’s beautiful word to life in our virtual space.

This Study Guide is meant to serve as a complement to the play in several ways. We encourage you to dive into the provided lesson plans, hear from the actor playing Julia, and get to know our awesome cast *before* you start listening.

Please continue to visit [steppenwolf.org/education](https://www.steppenwolf.org/education) for updates on new virtual programs being offered by Steppenwolf Education as well as an archive of past programs at [*steppenwolf.org/education/virtual-workshops/virtual-programs-archive/*](https://www.steppenwolf.org/education/virtual-workshops/virtual-programs-archive/) that can be accessed for free by anyone.

Steppenwolf Education celebrates the learner, maker and appreciator in each of us. Thank you for being part of our work.

**Indigenous Land Acknowledgement &   
Acknowledgement of Black Labor**

These two acknowledgments speak into the space erased histories; through this honoring, we uplift histories that often go unaffirmed and unacknowledged. Thank you for joining Steppenwolf Education in working towards a more empathetic tomorrow.

Land Acknowledgement

We recognize that Steppenwolf Theatre sits on Native land. The area our building resides on is the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires, including the Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa. Although for over 200 years Native Nations have been forcibly removed from this territory, we must acknowledge that this land continues to be a site of gathering and healing for more than a dozen other Tribal Nations and remains home to over 100,000 tribal members in the state of Illinois.

Acknowledgement of Black Labor

We recognize that America as we know it today was built at the often-fatal expense of forcefully enslaved Black people. We acknowledge and remember those who did not survive the Middle Passage, those who were beaten and lynched at the hands of White Americans, and those who died and are still dying while fighting for their freedom. We remember those who “toiled the grounds where many theatres have been built and resurrected.” We acknowledge that while fighting for their own lives and civil liberties, Black people have envisioned a world that will be better for all of humanity.

What is a land acknowledgement?

A land acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes and honors the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous communities and their traditional homelands. The purpose of recognizing the original inhabitants of this land is to show respect, gratitude, and appreciation to those whose land we reside on, as well as raise awareness about histories that are often erased or forgotten. It is important to understand the longstanding history that has brought us to reside on land currently occupied by non-Indigenous communities, and to pursue an understanding of everyone’s place within that history. It is important to note that land acknowledgements do not exist in a past tense: colonialism still lives with us today in various forms, and we hope you join us as we consider and interrogate our present participation.

What is a Black labor acknowledgement?

This living acknowledgement of Black Labor is a statement which recognizes and honors the African people who were enslaved at the hands white colonizers and subjugated to unpaid labor, and the descendants of enslaved African people. The purpose of recognizing this deep and difficult history is to show respect, gratitude and appreciation for the insurmountable contributions of the enslaved, who worked the land against their will for generations for the sake of American capitalism, as well as increase awareness about the horrific outcome of a distorted Black American history. It is important to acknowledge and understand the persistence of structural and institutional racism, and how we can all contribute to dismantling these systems and create new and equitable solutions. These living acknowledgements commit us to doing anti-racist work today and beyond, as these histories are still being perpetuated via present-day racial privileges. We invite you to join us as we educate ourselves and activate our ability to be agents of change.

For further resources around Land Acknowledgements, please visit:

American Indian Center [aicchicago.org/](https://aicchicago.org/)

Native Land Digital [native-land.ca/](https://native-land.ca/)

[“Indigenous Land Acknowledgement, Explained”](https://www.teenvogue.com/story/indigenous-land-acknowledgement-explained) - [Teen Vogue Article (February 2018)](https://www.teenvogue.com/story/indigenous-land-acknowledgement-explained) [teenvogue.com/story/indigenous-land-acknowledgement-explained](https://www.teenvogue.com/story/indigenous-land-acknowledgement-explained)

Unpaid Labor Contribution [unpaidlabor.com/](https://www.unpaidlabor.com/)

We are very grateful to our friends at the American Indian Center—Chicago for their guidance on Steppenwolf Theatre Company’s practice around Land Acknowledgements. Additionally, thank you to the Black Theatre Caucus and the authors of the “We See You W.A.T.” demands for providing the framework for this language. To learn more visit [*weseeyouwat.com/*](https://www.weseeyouwat.com/)

Finding Las Malcriadas

Getting to Know Erika L. Sánchez

By Former 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.

**PULL OUT QUOTE:** “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?” - Erika L. Sánchez

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’s *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.

**PULL OUT QUOTE:** “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.

**PULL OUT QUOTE:** “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 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.”

**PULL OUT QUOTE: “**Sometimes, we’re not what our parents expected, at all.” - Erika L. Sánchez

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*

Play Synopsis

By Brenna Barborka

**PULL OUT QUOTE:** "Didn’t you ever want something . . . more?"

1. Julia’s sister, Olga, dies after being hit by a semi-trailer truck while crossing the street. At the funeral, Julia stands away from her sister’s casket and observes the body of her *hermana* and laments the fact 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. The audience sees the action of the play unfold through Julia’s subconscious.
2. After the funeral, Julia sneaks into Olga’s room. Julia attempts to reach her sister through her thoughts, and we hear Olga represented as a series of windchimes. Julia stumbles upon 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 both the Continental and Olga’s best friend Angie’s house to look for answers but comes up empty-handed. Disheartened, she cheers herself up by going to her best friend Lorena’s house in hopes of distracting herself by smoking marijuana.
4. At school, Julia eats lunch with Lorena and the two meet Juanga; Juanga and Lorena hit it off while Julia has a harder time warming up to him. 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 cleans houses with Ama and decides to ask her 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 professor 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 white 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.

**PULL OUT QUOTE:** "What makes me who I am? What story does the world need to know?"

1. 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.
2. After weeks of not having her phone, Connor questions his relationship 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 her psychiatrist, Dr. Cooke.
3. Julia is able to break into Olga’s laptop and finds out she was seeing a married man with kids. The messages also tell her that Olga was pregnant when she died. Still unsure of how to help their daughter, Julia’s *padres* tell her that she’s visiting her *familia* in Mexico. Julia boards a plane to Mexico with Olga’s secrets. 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.

**PULL OUT QUOTE:** "I want to be a writer. I want to have my own life."

1. Julia’s college decision letters come in and she finds out that she got a full ride scholarship to both DePaul and NYU. NYU is her dream school and she enrolls there. When the time comes to move to New York, Julia tells her Amá y Apá goodbye 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?” Julia looks over and sees her seatmate, Olga, reading Julia’s book titled, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter.*

**PULL OUT QUOTE:** "How to we live with these secrets locked inside us?"

The Voices of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*

By Education Programs Assistant Lauren Katz

[***https://vimeo.com/534480305/e84900f84a***](https://vimeo.com/534480305/e84900f84a)*Run time: 4 minutes and 55 seconds. Video edited by Lowell Thomas*

Before listening to Steppenwolf for Young Adults’ aural adaptation of *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, be sure to familiarize yourself with the cast and the characters they play. Watch the video above to learn more about what the characters sound like, and how the cast worked to differentiate one character from the next! Below you can find character descriptions of everyone in the play!

Voiced by Steppenwolf ensemble member Karen Rodriguez:

**Julia**,this is her story**.** Wants to become a famous writer and is always taking notes in her journal. She loves her family but often feels like a disappointment to them. Since the death of her sister--the perfect daughter, Julia has felt more out of place and alone than ever. She/Her/Hers.

Voiced by Bianca Phipps:

**Olga**, Julia's older sister. She was the perfect Mexican daughter. Or was she? Now that she is gone, Julia finds herself wondering if she knew the real Olga. Permanently twenty-two, but never really looked or acted like a normal twenty-two-year-old. Could be the spitting image of Amá. In fact, they were practically besties. All she ever did was go to work, sit home with her parents, and take one class at the local community college. Or so Julia thought? Who was she really? Also plays ANGIE, JAZMYN, PATTY, SIOBHAN and PRIMA PALOMA. She/Her/Hers.

Voiced by Charin Álvarez:

**Amá**, Julia's amá, her mother. Has had a tough life and gives tough love to show for it. Julia is constantly frustrated that Amá does not hear her. Olga's passing pushes her past her breaking point, giving her even less space for Julia. Does she care? Or is she just upset that Julia isn't Olga? Perhaps it's more complicated than that. Also plays MAMÁ JACINTA, DR. COOKE, and ANGIE'S MOM. She/Her/Hers.

Voiced by Eddie Martinez

**Apá**, Julia's apá her father. He's around, but he's not really there. He's quiet and doesn't reveal much. Julia knows he must feel sad about Olga, but doesn't really talk about it. He also has to feel some concern for his only living daughter. Right? He and Amá are living their lives alongside Julia, but they feel so far away. Also plays TÍO CHUCHO, JOSE LUIS, JUANGA'S DAD, DR. CASTILLO, QUINCE DJ and MEXICAN CHEF. He/Him/His

Voiced by Leslie Sophia Perez:

**Lorena**, Julia's best friend in the entire world. Always around to keep Julia grounded. The kind of friend that will be there no matter what. A tough exterior due to a challenging past. But, after Olga dies, Julia finds herself brushing Lorena off more and more. And what do we make of Lorena and Juanga's new friendship? Does she have room for Julia anymore? Also plays BELÉN and TAQUERÍA LADY. She/Her/Hers.

Voiced by Robert Quintanilla:

**Juanga**, a new friend of Lorena's. He's given himself the same nickname as Mexican pop singer "Juan Gabriel", and like him, doesn't mind being the center of attention. Juanga loves clothes, parties, and gossiping with Lorena. But is that really all there is? Juanga and Lorena just seem to get each other, and they both know a lot more about sex than Julia. Where does Julia fit in? He/Him/His.

Voiced by Harrison Weger:

**Conner**, a friendly boy Julia meets at Myopic Books. He's from Evanston, he's white, and his family has way more money than hers. Julia's never been friends with someone like him before, but he and Julia like the same books, and he even reads poetry. Total nerd, and he is pretty cute. They come from different worlds, but can it still work? He/Him/His.

Voiced by Pete Moore:

**Mr. Ingman**, Julia's favorite teacher for her favorite class. Mr. Ingman is always trying to encourage Julia to stay focused on her schoolwork and college. He wants her to dream about her future. As much as he believes in Julia and makes her feel seen, sometimes he doesn't really understand the challenges of her world. Mr. Ingman means well, but he's still an old, white guy who's already been to college. Can he really help? He/Him/His.

**AMÁ**

*… what are you doing?*

**JULIA**

*Taking some notes…*

**AMÁ**

*This is a funeral, not a homework session.*

**JULIA**

*I’m not doing homework, I’m taking notes.*

Who is Julia Reyes?

Like many writers, or those who write to understand the world around them, Julia keeps a journal. A place where she takes notes, where she writes her thoughts, reflects on her days, and so much more. Through this interactive component of the Study Guide, we invite you to further explore Julia’s inner thoughts and noticings. Who are some of her favorite writers, how did she feel about the *Quinceanera*, and what did she notice as she took the train to Connor’s house? Click through to see not only some of her journal entries, but even some hidden questions for you to answer yourselves. If you had a journal like Julia, what would you write about? What moments in your lives would you include, and how would you immortalize them?

Julia’s Journal Entries

An Interactive Journey

By Education Programs Assistant Lauren Katz and Education Programs Coordinator Abhi Shrestha

**Journal Entry #1**Dear Olga,I always thought you were the perfect daughter. Saint Olga, you know? Amá and Apá couldn’t be prouder. But who were you?What was in your soul? I found a note and a key in your room.I keep learning all these things about you and none of it makes any sense. What were you hiding? Why were you hiding?...I miss you… like a lot.These three lines from Walt Whitman’s poem “I Sing the Body Electric” keep reminding me of Olga:   
  
*charge them full with the charge of the soul.  
And if those who defile the living are as bad as they who defile the dead?  
And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?*

**Guided Questions:**

1. Julia goes to Olga’s room for comfort in a time of need. What do you do for comfort, where do you go?
2. What helps you feel grounded in a time where nothing is making sense, or you are feeling alone?

**Journal Entry #2**  
  
Mr. Ingman said that our favorite words tell us a lot about ourselves. I believe him, but I don’t know what these words tell me… about me.   
  
I wonder what Olga’s favorite words are?  
  
**Favorite Words:**

* Wisteria
* Bloom
* Zealous
* Rain
* Abeyance → Walt Whitman used this word in “Some of Myself,” and I was obsessed
* Anheld
* Cascabel
* Apapachar
* Vespers → Use this in a poem?
* Sputter → Use this in a poem?

Mr. Ingman wants me to write about my parents’ immigration status for my college essay. He doesn’t get it. I’m glad he listened when I told him I wouldn’t do it. Sometimes it feels like he’s the only adult that does. Anyway, he told me to start by looking inward. What makes me who I am? I’m still stuck… it’s so much easier to write stories! I guess my college essay is also a story. My story.

**Guided Questions:**

Julia is trying to figure out what to write for her college essay, but she does not know where to start.

1. Write about a moment where you feel like you had something to create but didn’t know how to begin. What did you do? What questions did you ask?
2. What is your story? What do you want the world to know about you?

**Journal Entry #3:**

Amá: You’re going to have a Quinceañera!  
  
Me: But I’m already 15…  
  
Amá: What kind of girl doesn’t want a Quince?  
  
Me: Me. I don’t want one. You can’t make me!  
  
  
… Update - She made me. I can’t believe she made me. My dress was huge! AND it was the same color as…. Everything.   
  
… And then… just when I thought it couldn’t get worse. The father/daughter dance. It felt so… fake. Everyone was crying. I bet he doesn’t know what my favorite food or band is.  
  
I never wanted this Quince.   
  
  
**Guided Questions:**Amá wants this moment of cultural connection for Julia. Olga was never able to have her Quince, and now she wants this so deeply for Julia that she is not hearing Julia’s wishes.

1. Has a parent or guardian wanted something for you that you did not want? How did you respond?
2. What is something that you want? What is a dream that you want a loved one to understand about you?

**Journal Entry #4:**  
  
Even though I want to go away for college… I love Chicago. I love this city. The air just has something special. Maybe it’s Lake Michigan. And then there’s The El Train! Sometimes when I’m on the Brown Line coming from or going home, the sun sets and… when the sun sets in Chicago the buildings look like they’re on fire. It’s oddly beautiful.   
  
But then there’s the fact that the city is still kinda segregated. I had to take 3 trains to get to Connor in Evanston. It’s wild to see how the city fades into whiteness the further north you get…  
  
Butttt…. Then there’s the Chicago Public Libraries. I can… and have spent days at the Harold Washington. I don’t know what I would do without my library card.   
  
**Interaction:**See more at the [Chicago Public Library](https://www.chipublib.org/) website.

**Journal Entry #5:**I can’t believe Amá found my journal! Guess I need to find a new hiding place… she ripped any page that I cursed in… which is a lot…  
  
All my writing. All my memories… gone. At least I could salvage some of them.  
  
KISSING CONNOR  
  
Kissing him is like…. Kissing a cloud. He’s gentle, kind, and I actually like him. He holds my neck like kissing me is an emergency. ~~He’s also really gentle with his tongue~~. Something ~~about him makes me feel…. About the way he holds me….~~I wonder if I should write a Nancy Drew type of character, writing a mystery might be fun.

**Ripped Sticky Note:**… night back. I sneak into Olga’s room. Amá and Apá are asleep. I find the… letter, hotel key…. And sexy ~~lingerie~~.

**Guided Questions:**Amá finds Julia’s journal and begins to rip out pages without context. All of Julia’s writing, reflections, and thoughts are just gone. Amá does not understand, and this is a moment of deep pain for Julia.. She finds herself unsure of how to proceed after.

1. If you were in Julia’s shoes, how might you respond to Amá? How might you begin to put words together to help her understand?

**Journal Entry #6:**I already miss Mama Jacinta. I miss everyone, all the time. I’m so grateful for my time in Mexico. I just wish Olga was there. I learned so much about Amá and Apá. Why they are the way they are… I will never look at them the same again.  
  
  
Like for example, Apá was… is? An artist! He used to draw and paint all the time! Olga, can you imagine that? Grumpy Apá the artist?!  
  
  
He was so scared when I got into NYU. But I know he and Amá are proud of me. You would be proud of me, I think. I can’t believe I’m following my dreams. But also that's all I can do. I have to.

**Guided Questions:**   
  
Julia learns so much about her family’s history on her trip to Mexico, and it deeply impacts how she perceives her parents. Have you ever felt like you don’t understand your loved ones, or that they don’t understand you?

1. What questions could you ask to gain a deeper understanding of your family or loved ones? For example, do you know the dreams of your loved ones? Julia found out that she and her father were both artists. Are there any skills passed down in your family?
2. What are some dreams that you are excited to follow in the future? What kind of support do you feel you might need from loved ones to help them come true?

Julia Here and Now

A Conversation with Steppenwolf Ensemble Member Karen Rodriguez

An Interview by Young Adult Council Alumna Tatiana B. and Young Adult Council Member Isabella B.

Video edited by Lowell Thomas

Current and former Young Adult Council Members, and sisters, Tatiana B. and Isabella B. sat with Steppenwolf ensemble member Karen Rodriguez to discuss coming back to this show after its forced closure due to the pandemic in March 2020 and what she has learned about the character of Julia over the past two years. A beautiful, vulnerable, and intimate conversation about what it means to tell this story right now, and especially for a teen audience.

Visit [***vimeo.com/534455167/9c6c6192b4***](https://vimeo.com/534455167/9c6c6192b4) to listen to the full conversation between Karen, Isabella, and Tatiana *(run time 26 minutes and 06 seconds)*! Or, if you would prefer to read the full transcript of this conversation, you can do so [***here!***](https://www.steppenwolf.org/contentassets/8cfda5b671ce4254b2f908a3b1968484/julia-here-and-now-video-transcript.pdf)

PULL OUT QUOTE: "Sometimes she will succeed, and other times she won't, and it's just going to get better as she goes. I think. I hope. That's what we're all trying to do. --Karen Rodriquez

Nothing Makes Me Feel Better Than Tacos

Nourishing your Mental Wellness

An Activity by Young Adult Council Member Vicky C. and Teaching Artist Wilfredo ‘Freddie’ Ramos Jr.

“Nothing makes me feel better than tacos,” says Julia, a 15-year-old Mexican-American teenager growing up in Chicago, “Especially from Los Comales. There’s something about two tacos de *carne asada*, and one *al pastor* with extra limes that keeps the world’s problems at bay."  As we get to know Julia throughout Erika L. Sánchez’s novel, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, we learn that Julia experiences depression and that she struggles to access allies who will listen as well as strategies that will help her cope. Eating tacos is one strategy, and yet, Julia can't go to Los Comales every day, and tacos can't satisfy her hunger for a community that understands her.

Although Julia feels alone, she is not. Many teens today are also having a hard time. A 2021 U.S. Surgeon General report notes that “one in five children and adolescents will face a significant mental health condition during their school years.” This report was published before the COVID-19 pandemic, before hours and hours of online learning, before it became challenging to hang out with friends or safely spend time outside. In this environment, how can a teen practice mental wellness?

Not Your Perfect Taquería

**Welcome to Not Your Perfect Taquería**! Here, we invite you to create your own menu for mental wellness. Maybe you have a menu already. That’s great! This is an opportunity to add some new flavors to what you’ve got going.

How It Works

**Choose** any mental wellness “ingredient” below.

**Read** about how Julia included this “ingredient” in her own menu for mental wellness.

**Select** your own ingredients by answering the questions that follow.

**Enjoy** your recipe in real life!

**PULL OUT QUOTE:** “I want young people to know that it’s okay to be mentally ill and that it’s okay to ask for help.” - Erika L. Sánchez

HABITS

Through the play we see the effects of grief on the characters. “After the funeral… Amá doesn’t get out of bed for two weeks”, Julia says. Julia deals with her grief in a different way saying, “Sometimes Amá makes me so angry, I start pulling out my hair. I don’t even notice when I’m doing it” and, “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, Olga is right there”. On the one-year anniversary of Olga’s death Julia and her family still feel the effect of her death, “Amá still cries almost every single day. And Apá is silent as ever.” Lorena also deals with grief in her own way, “I don’t know why [my father] thought going back to Mexico for my grandma’s funeral was a good idea with everything going on, it’s so fucking stupid”. Even though they are all dealing with death, in the audio adaptation we can see the ways they cope differently.

Everyone deals with grief in unique ways. It’s important to think about what habits you take on in these situations.

* What are habitsdo you find yourself falling into when you’re feeling overwhelmed, sad, or feeling other tough emotions.
* How do you feel about those habits?
* What habits can you form to support you when you navigate these tough emotions?

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Nothing makes Julia feel better than tacos! Specifically, two tacos *de carne asada* and one *al pastor* with extra limes from Los Comales. Along with the tacos, Julia knows that Lorena always knows how to cheer her up. “I stop by Lorena’s on my way home. She always knows how to make me feel better”. Julia’s family in Los Ojos, Mexico, also makes her feel warm and welcome, “My *abuela*, Mamá Jacinta, my cousin Belén and my Tío Chucho all greet me like they’re actually happy to see me. And I believe them”. Everyone finds comfort in specific things or people when they’re upset; it is important to recognize what brings you comfort when you’re upset so you can navigate your feelings.

* What comforts you?
* Who can you always go to that providescomfort for you?
* What places feel like home for you?

TEEN ALLY

Moving through heartache can be hard, especially if it seems like everyone else is doing just fine. “Do you know how hard it’s been to talk to anyone in my family about this?” says Julia. “How I feel like a three-headed alien in my own home? I feel so lonely that I don’t know what to do with myself.” But Julia isn’t the only one in her friend group who’s in deep pain. Lorena still mourns her dad, who died while trying to cross the US-Mexico border, and Juanga tries not to show Lorena and Julia the bruises he gets at home. When it’s not safe or comfortable to share what’s on your mind with someone in your family, it can help to turn to your friends for support.

* Who is another teen who you could talk to when you’re struggling?
* Why do you feel you can talk to this person?
* What can your friends do or say to support you when you’re struggling?
* What support do you feel you have capacity to offer to your friends when they’re struggling?

ADULT ALLY

In addition to friends, trusted adults can also be sources of support and perspective, sometimes in surprising ways. Mr. Ingman tells Julia, “Julia, listen to me when I say this to you: it’s not your fault. You didn’t want your sister to die. Things like this just... happen. They do. It sucks, but they do.” He then goes on to tell Julia about his own sense of guilt for his mother’s sudden passing when he was younger. Although Julia and Mr. Ingman have different life experiences, their similar responses to the loss of their loved ones creates space for both of them to feel a little less alone.

* Who is an adult in your life (a teacher, a family member, a member of your church, a mentor, a member of your community) whom you could talk to when you’re struggling?
* Why do you feel you can talk to this person?
* What can this person do or say to support you when you’re struggling?

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE

Many people have experiences in life that are so traumatic or complex that they require the care of trained mental health professionals, such as a therapist or social worker, in order for the people experiencing distress to fully understand their struggles and how to begin overcoming them. Though people who know us well can love us fiercely, that love is sometimes not enough to meet our mental health needs. Julia discovers this when she meets Dr. Cooke, who starts Julia on antidepressants and asks to be Julia’s therapist. “I wanna be your coach.” says Dr. Cooke. “Will you let me be your coach?” Therapy, however, is not only for people facing moments of crisis. Therapy can also be a way to learn about how you think, how you feel, and how you want to live. If you choose to begin therapy, you and your therapist can work together to set goals that feel right for you.

* What mental health resources do you have at school or in your community? Which resources would you feel comfortable reaching out to? Why or why not?
* What qualities would you want a potential therapist or social worker to have so you can feel comfortable trusting them?
* What is 1 goal you would want to pursue with your therapist?
* What is 1 way you can care for yourself before seeing your therapist and 1 way you can care for yourself after?
* If you can’t access therapy (this is common!) or don’t want to work with a therapist (also common), what are three ways you can care for your mind and body on your own or with the support of your community?

DREAMS

At her sister’s funeral Julia ponders what her sister wanted to do in life. To Julia, Olga never acted like other twenty-two-year-olds she knew. She wonders if her sister ever wanted more than what she had, working, going to school, and living with her parents. Julia has a very clear idea of what she wants when she is older, “Ever since I could pick up a pen, I knew I was destined to be a famous writer. Like, people are gonna stop me in the middle of the street one day and ask, ‘Oh my God, are you Julia Reyes, the greatest writer who has ever lived?’ And Ima be like, ‘Peace out, mothafuckas.’” As a student, you may not have the clarity that Julia does, but thinking about what excites you right now might help you to find some clarity.

* Do you have any dreams/aspirations for your future right now?
* Are there any specific goals that you’re working towards right now that you want for your future?
* What kind of support do you need to achieve these dreams?

A Bond Thicker than Mole

**JÚLIA:** I love when Mamá Jacinta braids my hair. It's a bond thicker than mole. How does she always get it so nice and perfect like she does?

Now that you have finished your recipe, think about what you have learned about yourself. Through this creation you thought about your dreams, habits, comfort items, allies, and mental health resources, this self-exploration is important so that when you are feeling down, you know what you need and who you can go to to get through it. At the end of the play Julia acknowledges her journey through grief and knows that the feelings of guilt she feels might never go away, but she has the tools to deal with them. “I still can’t help but feel guilty about the whole thing. Will it ever go away? Feeling bad for something that’s not my fault? Who knows? Maybe not.”

* How will you apply this knowledge moving forward?
* How can knowing these things help on your mental health journey?
* Healing is not constant, through your mental health journey you will reach peaks and valleys, but as long as you commit to yourself and the things that serve you, you can get through it. Always remember that you are not alone.

Better With Friends

Plan a video chat with friends during which you all make tacos (or whatever your favorite comfort foods might be!) for real. As you eat, share the recipes you made in this activity and in real life. Share as much or as little as is comfortable for you and your friends. Share especially about how you can be of support to one another when times are tough. *¡Buen provecho!*

For more resources around Mental Health please visit our Mental Health Resources page below.

Imagining the Future

A Classroom Activity

Written by Education Programs Coordinator Abhi Shrestha and Education Programs Assistant Lauren Katz

Activity Time: 45 minutes

**JULIA:** Ever since I could pick up a pen, I knew I was destined to be a famous writer. Like, people are gonna stop me in the middle of the street one day and ask, “Oh my God, are you Júlia Reyes, the greatest writer who has ever lived?” And Ima be like, “Peace out, mothafuckas.”

Part one: Who will you become?

10 minutes

Julia always knew she was destined to be a writer. **What is your destiny?**

Students are going to create a vision for who they will become in the future, at around age 30. Using the following guided questions, students will be asked to create a profile of their future selves at age 30:

* At age 30, I live \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (where?)
* I have finished (select one) college/trade school/job training/graduate school and studied or trained in \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (what?)
* If I have a job:  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (what is it?)
* I am (select one) married/partnered/single
* My favorite hobby is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (what?)
* My best friend is someone I met \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (where or when in life?)
* I own a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (consider, where do you live? Do you own a house or a car? Or if you own your own furniture or other important items!)
* In my free time, I \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (what do you do in your free time? What are your hobbies?)
* I have a pet \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (what is it?!) named \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (what?)
* Anything else you dream about your future self?

Part Two: Creating a Your Future Mood Board

15 minutes

Using the above profile as inspiration, create a mood board or collage for your future self! Consider the questions below as you create (You can find a model [here](https://www.steppenwolf.org/contentassets/8cfda5b671ce4254b2f908a3b1968484/imagining-the-future_-mood-board-model.pdf)):

* Where will you live? What will your home look like? What color, and how big is it?
* What kind of clothes will you wear? Will your style change from now until then?
* What might be your future job? What are your dream responsibilities? Do you travel for work, or do you like to work from home?
* What will you do for fun? Are you one to go out a lot with friends? What will you all do?
* What is your favorite way to spend a day off? What are your hobbies? What do you like to read or what music do you listen to?

Part Three: Talking to your Future Self

15 minutes

What if you could talk to your future self? What might you say, and what would you want them to say in return?

Imagine that your current self and future self meet! In this next part of the exercise, you are going to create a scene between the two versions of yourself by utilizing some of the text as noted in italics below from *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* to help get you started.

Consider the following as you write your dialogue:

* What advice might your 30-year-old self have for your current self?
* What is something comforting or encouraging your 30-year-old self might tell your current self?
* What does your current self want your future self to know? What do you want to ensure you remember?
* What about your current self do you hope to retain as you grow older?

**SCENE TEMPLATE and PROMPT:**

**Prompt**: In the audio adaptation, JULIA speaks to her dead sister OLGA as she reflects on and digests on what is happening in her day-to-day life, as she processes her grief, and as she navigates a new relationship. In this exercise, you are going to have a conversation with your 30-year-old future self (weird, we know!) in order to give that future self a bit more insight into who you are now and by reflecting on who you might become in the future. (You can find the model below in italics.)

**A** (30 year-old self): Can you hear me?

**B** (current self): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
*Model Response: “Yes, I think so.”*

**A**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
*Model Response: How is school? Are you finding any of the classes exciting?*

**B**: I know I never told you much about school.

**A**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
*Model Response: I know it’s hard. If you stick through it, I promise it will get easier. All of those fights and challenges will feel so much smaller one day.*

**B**: You were so much better than me. The perfect--

**A**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
*Model: Hey, no one is perfect! You never really know what is happening on the inside.*

**B**: Sometimes \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ makes me so angry, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ makes me pull out my hair.   
*Model: Sometimes Mom makes me so angry; she makes me pull out my hair.*

**A**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
*Model: I know mom can make you angry. Believe me, I was there too! One day, that will feel easier too. Right now might be rough, but one day, you will make it through.*

**B**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
*Model: Thank you for that advice. I never tell anyone about it, but I really love art class. Do I still love art in the future?*  
**A**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
*Model: You never lose that love for art!*

**B**: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
*Model: Good! That’s something I hope to never lose.*

Guided Questions for Reflection:

5 minutes

* Julia has always had big dreams of being a writer. What if she could talk to her future self? What do you think she would want her future self to remember about the present?
* Why do you think Julia finds comfort in her imaginary conversations with Olga?
* How did you find having an imaginary conversation with your future self? Did you find any aspects comforting?
* What parts of yourself do you hope make it to the future version of you?

Inside/Outside

A Classroom Activity

by Abhi Shrestha, Greg Geffrard,  Lauren Katz, and Tiffany Fulson

Activity Time: 45 minutes

**Julia**: Do you have any idea what it’s like to be me? To be Mexican? To be a woman? To be poor? To have your sister dead? To live in a shitty neighborhood? To have everyone around you treat you like shit? To be scrutinized all the time because I am who I am? Do you?

Part one: Defining Inside/Outside?

5 minutes

In a group have a discussion rooted in these two questions:

* **How would you define “inside actions/emotions?”** Popcorn out some examples - *fear, sadness, anxiety, hands trembling, having a nightmare*
* **How would you define “outside actions/emotions”?** Popcorn out some examples - *anger, making fists, tears, stomping feet, screaming out loud*

Part Two: Analyzing the Text

15 minutes

**Introduce this Scene between** [Julia and Connor](https://drive.google.com/file/d/11keL6y_7DIGM5xJvYfG0IpSKNhkkDkY6/view).   
  
[*https://drive.google.com/file/d/11keL6y\_7DIGM5xJvYfG0IpSKNhkkDkY6/view?usp=sharing*](https://drive.google.com/file/d/11keL6y_7DIGM5xJvYfG0IpSKNhkkDkY6/view)

As a class, you will read it through twice.

* During the first read, focus on Julia.  After, make a list of words that describe **both** Julia’s inside and outside actions/emotions.
* During the second read, focus on Connor. After, make a list of words that describe **both** Connor’s inside and outside actions/emotions.

Part Three: Art Making

15 minutes

Pick a character from the scene - Julia or Connor. This will be the character on whom you will focus for your artmaking.

Take a look back at your words describing your chosen character’s inner and outer emotions/actions.

Circle your top four words from each list - 4 from the inner list and 4 from the outer list.

From there, you will follow the recipe below as you make your Inside/Outside Collage:

* Google to find or create yourself 3-5 images that represent the **four outside** words for your character. (Feel free to use tools like google images or Same Energy, or even draw them yourself!)
* Google to find or /create yourself 3-5 images that represent the **four inside** words for your character. (Feel free to use tools like google images or Same Energy, or even draw them yourself!)
* Next, create a virtual collage made up of the inside and outside images you’ve chosen to represent JULIA or CONNOR in this scene. Feel free to use Google Slides, Jamboard, or even paper and coloring utensils! [See here for a model collage.](https://www.steppenwolf.org/contentassets/8cfda5b671ce4254b2f908a3b1968484/classroom-activity-2-model-julia.pdf)

Part Four: Reflection

10 minutes

Take a moment to share your art with peers by sharing your screen one-by-one and showing your virtual collage! Afterwards, discuss and reflect on the following question: *How might things have been different if Connor and Julia could have seen each other’s collages?*

Guided Questions:

* How might things have been different if Connor knew how Julia was feeling on the inside?
* How might Julia have responded if she knew how Connor was feeling on the inside?
* Could the scene (or their relationship) have ended differently?

Recommendations from our Partners

Chicago Public Library Recommends…

We at Steppenwolf are thrilled to have partnered for many years with the Chicago Public Libraries as a part of our City Connections programs – a programming model focused on identifying authentic ways to bring barrier-free programming into communities we don’t currently serve with the hope that young and emerging adults can feel inspired to join us at Steppenwolf.

As a part of this partnership, last year when we produced the stage adaptation of ‘I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter’ we turned to the Chicago Public Library’s Teen Services and Content Curation Departments to provide their expert opinions on ways teachers and students might dive deeper into the world of this production. The following lists were prepared by Chicago Public Library staff as a resource guide to help you and your students explore themes and topics related to, *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*. Learn more about what CPL has to offer at chipublib.org.

FICTION

**American Street** by Ibi Zoboi

On the corner of American Street and Joy Road, Fabiola Toussaint thought she would finally find *une belle vie*—a good life. But after they leave Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Fabiola’s mother is detained by U.S. immigration, leaving Fabiola to navigate her loud American cousins; the grittiness of Detroit’s west side; a new school; and a surprising romance, all on her own. Just as she finds her footing in this strange new world, a dangerous proposition presents itself, and Fabiola soon realizes that freedom comes at a cost. Trapped at the crossroads of an impossible choice, will she pay the price for the American dream?

**Bridge** by Patrick Jones

José can't keep up. As the only English speaker in a family of undocumented immigrants, he handles everything from taking family members to the doctor to bargaining with the landlord. Plus he works two jobs. With all this responsibility, he's missing a lot of school. When he does make it, he falls asleep in class. José knows he has to turn things around if he wants to graduate from Rondo Alternative High School. Can he raise his grades enough to have a shot at college and a better life? Or will he be forced to drop out of school for good?

**Cuba 15** by Nancy Osa

Violet Paz has just turned fifteen, a pivotal birthday in the eyes of her Cuban grandmother. But while Violet is half Cuban, she's also half Polish, and more importantly, she feels 100% American. Except for her zany family's passion for playing dominoes, smoking cigars, and dancing to Latin music, Violet knows little about Cuban culture, nada about quinces, and only tidbits about the history of Cuba. So when Violet begrudgingly accepts Abuela's plans for a *quinceañero* - and as she begins to ask questions about her Cuban roots-cultures and feelings collide.

**Love, Hate and Other Filters** by Samira Ahmed

Seventeen-year-old Maya Aziz is torn between worlds. There's the proper one her parents expect for their good Indian daughter: attending a college close to their suburban Chicago home and being paired off with an older Muslim boy her mom deems "suitable." And then there is the world of her dreams: going to film school and living in New York City--and pursuing a boy she's known since grade school. But in the aftermath of a horrific crime perpetrated hundreds of miles away, her life is turned upside down. The community she's known since birth becomes unrecognizable; neighbors and classmates are consumed with fear, bigotry, and hatred. Ultimately, Maya must find the strength within to determine where she truly belongs.

NON-FICTION

**Americanized**: **Rebel Without a Green Card** by Sara Saedi

At thirteen, bright-eyed, straight-A student Sara Saedi uncovered a terrible family secret: she was breaking the law simply by living in the United States. Only two years old when her parents fled Iran, she didn't learn of her undocumented status until her older sister wanted to apply for an after-school job but couldn't because she didn't have a Social Security number. Fear of deportation kept Sara up at night, but it didn't keep her from being a teenager. From discovering that her parents secretly divorced to facilitate her mother's green card application to learning how to tame her unibrow, Sara pivots gracefully from the terrifying prospect that she might be kicked out of the country at any time to the almost-as-terrifying possibility that she might be the only one of her friends without a date to the prom.

**(Don’t) Call Me Crazy: 33 Voices Start the Conversation about Mental Health** edited by Kelly Jensen

To understand mental health, we need to talk openly about it. Because there’s no single definition of crazy, there’s no single experience that embodies it, and the word itself means different things—wild? extreme? disturbed? passionate?—to different people. In *(Don’t) Call Me Crazy*, thirty-three actors, athletes, writers, and artists offer essays, lists, comics, and illustrations that explore a wide range of topics.

POETRY

**Lessons on Expulsion** by Erika L. Sánchez

Poet, novelist, and essayist Erika L. Sánchez’s powerful debut poetry collection explores what it means to live on both sides of the border—the border between countries, languages, despair and possibility, and the living and the dead. Sánchez tells her own story as the daughter of undocumented Mexican immigrants and as part of a family steeped in faith, work, grief, and expectations. The poems confront sex, shame, race, and an America roiling with xenophobia, violence, and laws of suspicion and suppression. With candor and urgency, and with the unblinking eyes of a journalist, Sánchez roves from the individual life into the lives of sex workers, narco-traffickers, factory laborers, artists, and lovers. What emerges is a powerful, multifaceted portrait of survival.

**Electric Arches** by Eve L. Ewing

Electric Arches is an imaginative exploration of black girlhood and womanhood through poetry, visual art, and narrative prose. Blending stark realism with the fantastical, Ewing takes us from the streets of Chicago to an alien arrival in an unspecified future, deftly navigating boundaries of space, time, and reality with delight and flexibility.

**Poet X** by Elizabeth Acevedo (Also recommended by our partners at Mujeres)

The novel The Poet X by Elizabeth Acevedo is a coming-of-age story told through poetry. The protagonist, a Dominican American teenager growing up in New York City, finds her voice through slam poetry. This novel touches on themes of intergenerational trauma, mental health, and religion. It centers poetry as a tool for self-discovery and self-expression.

MULTI-MEDIA

**This is Normal** (Podcast)

*This is Normal* is a podcast where young people talk about their own mental health challenges -- and how they got through them. Because when we share our stories, we can all feel a little less alone.

**15: A Quinceañera Story** (Film)

15: *A Quinceañera Story* is a collection of four short documentary films, follows five Latina girls all observing the traditional rite of passage of the *quinceañera*, a celebration of their 15th birthdays. The documentary chronicles the girls and their families as they navigate the complexities of coming of age in the U.S.

Mental Health Resources

Steppenwolf Education works in partnership with licensed social workers from Primo Center for Women and Children, Chicago Children’s Center for Behavioral Health, Communities in Schools of Chicago, Youth Outreach Services, and Mujeres: Latinas in Acción. When we presented *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* in person in the Spring of 2020, we had on-site counselors who held space as needed for teens who felt like they needed or wanted to talk to a trained mental health professional at any point during their experience.

Please contact Education Programs Coordinator Abhi Shrestha (ashrestha@steppenwolf.org) for more information about these organizations and how to connect with them. Youth in need of professional support can seek out of one of these resources:

* **Mujeres Latinas in Acción** [mujereslatinasenaccion.org](https://mujereslatinasenaccion.org/) | 773.890.7676
* **National Runaway Safeline** [1800runaway.org/youth-teens](https://www.1800runaway.org/youth-teens) | 1.800.786.2929
* **Youth Outreach Services** [yos.org/services/counseling](https://www.yos.org/services/counseling) | 773.777.7112

Please find information for our core partner for *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, Mujeres Latinas in Acción [mujereslatinasenaccion.org/programs/](https://mujereslatinasenaccion.org/programs/).

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

Common Core State Standards

Aligned with Classroom Activities in this Study Guide

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR READING, STANDARD 1:

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text

See Inside Outside: A Classroom and Imagining the Future Classroom Activities

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR READING, STANDARD 2:

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

See ‘I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter Show Synopsis’

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR READING, STANDARD 3:

Analyze how and why individuals, events and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

See 'Inside/Outside: A Classroom Activity' and 'Julia's Journal Entries: An Interactive Journey'

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR READING, STANDARD 10:

Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

See ‘Finding Las Malcriadas’

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR WRITING, STANDARD 3:

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

See 'Imagining the Future' Classroom Activity

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS ANCHOR STANDARDS FOR WRITING, STANDARD 4:

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

See 'Imagining the Future' Classroom Activity

If you need further information on how grade-specific standards fit into these anchor standards, please let us know.

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Anna D. Shapiro†       E. Brooke Flanagan  
Artistic Director         Executive Director

STEPPENWOLF THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTS

*Isaac Gómez’s*

I AM NOT YOUR PERFECT MEXICAN DAUGHTER

Based on the novel by **Erika L. Sánchez**Co-Directed by Ensemble Members **Sandra Marquez**\*† and **Audrey Francis**\*†

*Featuring:*  
  
**Charín Alvarez\*, Eddie Martinez\*, Peter Moore, Robert Quintanilla, Karen Rodriguez**†**\*,, Leslie Sophie Perez, Bianca Phipps, and Harrison Weger  
  
Matt Chapman** Sound Design & Original Music

**Kenya Hall** Artistic Producer

**Claire Haupt** Production Manager

**JC Clementz, CSA** Casting Director

**Michelle Medvin**\* Production Stage Manager

**Jacqueline Saldana**\* Assistant Stage Manager

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† member of the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble.  
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Artist Bios

**Charín Álvarez** (Amá) Steppenwolf Theatre Company: La Ruta, Infidel, Ordinary Yearning, Fermi. Chicago: Lettie, Mojada, Oedipus El Rey, Anna in the Tropics, A Park in the House (Victory Gardens Theater); The Scene (Writers Theatre); 2666, Pedro Paramo, El Nogalar, Dollhouse, Electricidad (Goodman Theatre); In the Time of the Butterflies, Our Lady of the Underpass, I Put the Fear of Mexico in ‘Em, Dreamlandia, Another Part of the House (Teatro Vista); Water by the Spoonful (Court Theatre). Film: St. Frances, Arc of a Bird, Were the World Mine, Signature Move, Hala, Princess Cyd, A Place to Be, Olympia. Television: Easy, Shameless, Chicago Fire, Mob Doctor, Boss.

**Eddie Martinez** (Apá)Steppenwolf Theatre Company: Our Lady of 121st Street. Chicago: Parachute Men, Fade, In the Time of the Butterflies (Teatro Vista, ensemble member); Big Lake Big City, Cascabel (Lookinglass Theatre); Rightlynd (Victory Gardens Theater); Romeo y Julieta (Chicago Shakespeare Theater). Regional: Native Gardens (The Old Globe); Fade (Denver Center, Cherry Lane, TheaterWorks); As You Like It (Denver Center). Film: The Dilemma. Television: Sense8, Sirens, Chicago Fire.

**Peter Moore** (Mr. Ingman) Steppenwolf Theatre Company: The Crucible, August: Osage County (u/s). Chicago: Pomona, Linda, Birdland, Hinter, The Few, The Cheats, Brilliant Adventures, among others (Steep Theatre); Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom (Writers Theatre); In the Canyon (Jackalope Theatre); The Downpour (Route 66 Theatre). Film: Convergence, Dhoom 3. Television: The Red Line, Chicago P.D., Chicago Justice, Chicago Fire. Education: The School at Steppenwolf, Bowdoin College. He is Artistic Director and a founding member of Steep Theatre and is represented by Paonessa Talent.

**Leslie Sophia Perez** (Lorena)Steppenwolf Theatre Company: I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter. Chicago: Feroz (Water People Theatre); Project Potential (Theatre on the Lake); Assumptions and Forgiveness (American Blues). TV: Chicago P.D.; Es Un Show. Print: Wrigley; Gatorade. She is currently enrolled at The Theatre School of DePaul University pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Acting, class of 2022. She was born and raised just outside Chicago. Leslie Sophia is funny, outgoing and full of wit. Her smile and laugh are infectious!

**Bianca Phipps** (Olga) Chicago: The Living Newspaper Festival (Jackalope Theater); Hamlet (Midsommer Flight). Regional: Romeo and Juliet, Much Ado About Nothing, Othello, A Midsummer Night's Dream (Nebraska Shakespeare). Bianca is proudly represented by Actors Talent Group. Endless gratitude and love to Sam and the 22nd class.

**Robert Quintanilla** (Juanga) Chicago: I Wanna Fucking Tear You Apart (Rivendell Theatre Ensemble); For Services Rendered (Griffin Theatre); Big Fish (Boho Theatre); United Flight 232 (The House Theatre); 1776, Woman of the Year, Fade Out, Fade In (Porchlight Music Theatre); The View Upstairs (Circle Theatre). “Robert would like to thank Isaac Gómez and Sandra Marquez for this incredible opportunity. He sends his love to his family and Shirley Hamilton Talent for their never-ending support. Si se puede!” @princequesadilla. Robertquintanilla.com

**Karen Rodriguez** (Julia)Karen Rodriguez is a proud Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble member who was most recently seen in the Steppenwolf for Young Adults adaptation of I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, and in Steppenwolf's main series productions of Dance Nation, La Ruta, The Doppelgänger (an international farce) and The Rembrandt. She also appeared in the world premiere of Breach by Antoinette Nwandu at Victory Gardens Theater and in the critically acclaimed solo show The Way She Spoke by Isaac Gómez at Greenhouse Theater Center. Other Chicago credits include The Displaced (Haven); Hookman (Steep Theatre); Blue Skies Process, Another Word for Beauty (Goodman Theatre); good friday (Oracle, Jeff nomination for Best Ensemble); Don Chipotle (The Storefront Theater). Television credits include Chicago Fire and Chicago Justice. Ms. Rodriguez is a 2017 recipient of the Make a Wave 3Arts Award.

**Harrison Weger** (Connor)Chicago: Defiance (Buffalo Theatre Ensemble); Proof (MadKap Productions); Fight City, Born Ready (Factory Theater); Scarcity (Redtwist Theatre); Charlotte’s Web (Emerald City Theatre). Television: Chicago Fire. Education: BFA Acting, DePaul University. “I’m forever grateful to Stewart Talent, my family and my partner, Dyllan, for all their love and support.”

**Isaac Gómez** (Playwright/Adaptor)is an award-winning Chicago-based playwright originally from El Paso, Texas/Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. His adaptation of Erika L. Sánchez's award-winning novel I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter had its world premiere with a Steppenwolf for Young Adults production in February 2020, and his play La Ruta received its world premiere at Steppenwolf Theater Company in December of 2018. His play the way she spoke will be receiving its Off-Broadway premiere at the Minetta Lane Theatre (produced by Audible) in Summer 2019. He is currently under commission from South Coast Repertory, Denver Center for the Performing Arts, and Steep Theatre. His plays have been supported by Steppenwolf Theater Company, Denver Center, Primary Stages, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Goodman Theatre, and others. He is the recipient of the 2018 Dramatists Guild Lanford Wilson Award, the 2017 Jeffry Melnick New Playwright Award at Primary Stages, an inaugural 3Arts “Make A Wave” grantee, and holds various affiliations with artistic organizations nationally and locally. He is a Professional Lecturer at The Theatre School at DePaul University, and is represented by The Gersh Agency and Circle of Confusion.

**Sandra Marquez** (Co-Director)joined the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble in 2016. Last season she played Nora in A Doll’s House, Part 2 and directed the acclaimed production of La Ruta by Isaac Gómez. Other Steppenwolf credits include The Roommate, The Doppelgänger (an international farce), Mary Page Marlowe, The Motherf\*\*ker with the Hat, A Streetcar Named Desire, Sonia Flew and One Arm. At Teatro Vista, where she is a longtime company member and former Associate Artistic Director, she directed Fade, My Mañana Comes, Breakfast Lunch & Dinner and the Jeff nominated production of Our Lady of the Underpass. She is the recipient of a Jeff Award for her work in Teatro Vista’s A View from the Bridge. Marquez completed a three-year arc playing Clytemnestra in Court Theatre’s Iphigenia Cycle (Iphigenia at Aulis, Electra and Agamemnon). Film and television credits include Red Line, Boss, Empire, Chicago Med, Chicago Justice and Timer, among others. She is on the theater faculty at Northwestern University.

**Audrey Francis** (Co-Director)joined the Steppenwolf Theatre Company ensemble in 2017. Steppenwolf: Animal Farm, Dance Nation, The Doppelgänger: (an international farce), You Got Older, The Fundamentals, Between Riverside and Crazy, The Herd. Chicago: Kill Floor (American Theater Company); Witch, Othello, Another Part of the Forest (Writers Theatre); Awake and Sing! (Northlight Theatre); Talking Pictures (Goodman Theatre). Film: Knives and Skin, Later Days, Signature Move. TV: Empire, Chicago Med, Chicago Fire. Directing credits include Plano (First Floor Theatre with Steppenwolf's 1700 Lookout Series) and The Invisible Hand (Steep Theatre). Audrey is also the proud co-founder of Black Box Acting.

**Matthew Chapman** (Sound Designer)Steppenwolf Theatre Company: I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, You Got Older, The Burials. Chicago: Earthquakes in London, The Few, Posh, The Cheats, The Life and Sort of Death of Eric Argyle, Motortown, If There Is I Haven’t Found It Yet, The Knowledge, 2000 Feet Away, Harper Regan (Steep Theatre Company - ensemble member); Chicago Voices (Lyric Opera of Chicago). World premieres: Give It All Back, Mai Dang Lao (Sideshow Theatre Company), Prowess (Jackalope Theatre), Body and Blood (The Gift Theatre); Kill Floor (American Theatre Company); Balm in Gilead (Griffin Theatre). He is Steppenwolf’s LookOut Production Supervisor. For Maria.

**Michelle Medvin** (Production Stage Manager) Steppenwolf Theatre Company: the original I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, We Are Proud to Present a Presentation…, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, two versions of The Crucible, August: Osage County, Purple Heart (also at Ireland’s Galway Arts Festival), The Pillowman, and many others. Chicago: Northlight Theatre, Drury Lane Theatre, Victory Gardens Theater, Chicago Children's Theatre. Regional: Hartford Stage, Dallas Theater Center, Portland Center Stage. Education: Smith College. Michelle serves as Production Manager and Adjunct Faculty at Governors State University. She is proud to be a member of Actors’ Equity, wife to Mary, and mama to Elliott, Lena, and Samuel.

**Jacqueline Saldana** (Assistant Stage Manager)Steppenwolf Theatre Company: I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, Dance Nation, Lindiwe, The Roommate, The Doppelgänger (an international farce), BLKS, The Crucible. Chicago: The Music Man, The Winter’s Tale, Sweat, How to Catch Creation, A Christmas Carol, We’re Only Alive for A Short Amount of Time (Goodman Theatre). Education: BTA, University of Michigan. Saldana is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association.

**Anna D. Shapiro** (Artistic Director) is a Tony Award-winning director and Artistic Director of Steppenwolf Theatre Company. She joined the Steppenwolf ensemble in 2005 and was awarded the 2008 Tony Award for Best Direction of a Play for August: Osage County (Steppenwolf, Broadway, London). She was nominated in 2011 in the same category for The Motherf\*\*ker with the Hat (Public Theater, Labyrinth Theater). Other Steppenwolf directing credits include the world premiere production of The Minutes, Mary Page Marlowe, Visiting Edna, Three Sisters, A Parallelogram, Up, The Crucible, The Unmentionables (also at Yale Repertory Theatre), The Pain and the Itch (also in New York), I Never Sang for My Father, Man from Nebraska, Purple Heart (also in Galway, Ireland), The Drawer Boy, Side Man (also in Ireland, Australia and Vail, Colorado), Three Days of Rain, The Infidel and This Is Our Youth (which transferred to Broadway). Additional Broadway credits include Of Mice and Men (with James Franco) and Fish in the Dark (with Larry David), and Off Broadway Domesticated (Lincoln Center Theater). She is directing the new Broadway musical The Devil Wears Prada with music by Sir Elton John, lyrics by Shaina Taub and book by Paul Rudnick. Shapiro is a graduate of the Yale School of Drama and Columbia. She is a professor in Northwestern University’s Department of Theatre.

**E. Brooke Flanagan** (Executive Director) most recently served as Managing Director at Chicago Shakespeare Theater (CST) before becoming Executive Director of Steppenwolf Theatre Company in 2020. At CST, she led fundraising and external affairs programs and serving as a strategic partner to the Board of Directors, Artistic Director Barbara Gaines and Executive Director Criss Henderson. She increased the Tony Award-winning Theater’s annual contributed income by 50%. In 2012, she launched the historic Our City, Our Shakespeare endowment and capital campaign, which successfully closed above goal in 2018 after raising $61.6 million. Prior to joining Chicago Shakespeare, Brooke Flanagan spent seven seasons at Steppenwolf Theatre as Director of Major Gifts. She was the Associate Director of Development for Ravinia Festival from 2000-2004, and also held key positions at League of Chicago Theatres and Santa Fe Opera. She has served as Board Chair for Arts Alliance Illinois since 2016. She resides in Chicago’s Old Town neighborhood with her husband and three children, who proudly attend a Chicago Public School.

**TRANSCRIPTS**

**The Voices of I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter**Transcript -- Spanish Translation

**Las Voces de Yo No Soy Tu Perfecta Hija Mexicana**

**Por la Asistente de Programas Educativos Lauren Katz y Ex Aprendiz de Educación Elon Sloan**

Antes de escuchar la adaptación de audio de Steppenwolf para Adultos Jóvenes de *Yo No Soy Tu Perfecta Hija Mexicana*, asegúrate de familiarizarte con el elenco y los personajes que interpretan a través de las descripciones a continuación. La mayoría de los miembros del elenco proporcionan las voces de varios personajes a lo largo de la historia - haga clic aquí para saber más sobre cómo suenan los personajes, y cómo el elenco trabajó para diferenciar un personaje de otro.

**Julia, con la voz de Karen Rodriguez, miembro del grupo de Steppenwolf:**

Esta es su historia. Quiere ser una escritora famosa y siempre está tomando notas en su diario. Quiere a su familia, pero frecuentemente se siente decepcionada por ellos. Desde la muerte de su hermana - la hija perfecta, Julia se ha sentido más desubicada y sola que nunca.

**Olga, con la voz de Bianca Phipps: (También interpreta a ANGIE, JAZMYN, PATTY, SIOBHAN y PRIMA PALOMA)**

La hermana mayor de Julia. Era la hija mexicana perfecta.. ¿O lo era? Ahora que se ha ido, Julia se encuentra preguntándose si conocía a la verdadera Olga. Permanentemente veintidós años, pero nunca pareció, ni actuó como una joven normal de veintidós años. Podría ser la viva imagen de Amá. De hecho, eran prácticamente mejores amigas. Lo único que ella hacía era ir a trabajar, sentarse en casa con sus padres y tomar una clase en el colegio comunitario local. O ¿eso pensaba Julia? ¿Quién era ella, en realidad?

**Amá, con la voz de Charin Álvarez: (También interpreta a MAMÁ JACINTA, DR. COOKE y LA MAMÁ DE ANGIE)**

Amá de Julia, su madre. Ha tenido una vida dura y da un amor duro para demostrarlo. Julia está constantemente frustrada de que Amá no la escucha. El fallecimiento de Olga empuja a Amá más allá de su punto de ruptura, dándole aún menos espacio para Julia. ¿Le importa? ¿O simplemente le molesta que Julia no sea Olga? Quizás sea más complicado que eso.

**Apá, con la voz de Eddie Martinez: (También interpreta a TÍO CHUCHO, JOSE LUIS, EL PAPÁ DE JUANGA, DR. CASTILLO, QUINCE DJ y CHEF MEXICANO)**

Apá de Julia, su padre. Está presente, pero no está realmente. Está callado y no revela mucho. Julia sabe que debe sentirse triste por Olga, pero no habla de ello. También debe sentir cierta preocupación por su única hija viva. Él y Amá están viviendo sus vidas juntos a Julia, pero se sienten muy lejos.

**Lorena, con la voz de Leslie Sophia Perez: (También interpreta a BELÉN y TAQUERIA LADY)**

La mejor amiga de Julia en todo el mundo. Siempre cerca para mantener a Julia con los pies en la tierra. El tipo de amiga que estará allí sin importar lo que pase. Un exterior duro debido a un pasado difícil. Pero, después de la muerte de Olga, Julia se encuentra rechazando a Lorena cada vez más. ¿Y qué hacemos con la nueva amistad de Lorena y Juanga? ¿Tiene ella espacio para Julia?

**Juanga, con la voz de Robert Quintanilla:**

Un nuevo amigo de Lorena. Se ha puesto el mismo apodo que el cantante pop mexicano "Juan Gabriel", y como él, no le importa ser el centro de atención. A Juanga le encanta la ropa, las fiestas y chismosear con Lorena. Pero, ¿es eso realmente todo lo que hay? Juanga y Lorena parecen entenderse, y ambos saben mucho más sobre sexo que Julia. ¿Dónde queda Julia?

**Conner, con la voz de Harrison Weger:**

Un chico amigable que Julia conoce en Myopic Books. Es de Evanston, es blanco y su familia tiene mucho más dinero que la de ella. Julia nunca ha sido amiga de alguien como él, pero a él y a Julia les gustan los mismos libros, e incluso lee poesía. Es un nerd total y además es bastante guapo. Vienen de mundos diferentes, pero ¿puede funcionar?

**Sr. Ingman, con la voz de Pete Moore:**

El profesor favorito de Julia de su clase favorita. El Sr. Ingman siempre trata de animar a Julia para que se concentre en su trabajo escolar y en la universidad. Quiere que ella sueñe con su futuro. Por mucho que crea en Julia y la hace sentir valorada, a veces no entiende realmente los retos de su mundo. El Sr. Ingman tiene buenas intenciones, pero sigue siendo un viejo blanco que ya ha ido a la universidad. ¿Puede realmente ayudar?

**I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter Play Synopsis  
Spanish Translation**

***Yo No Soy Tu Perfecta Hija Mexicana* Sinopsis de la Adaptación de Audio**

**Por: Dramaturge De Producción Brenna Barborka**

1. La hermana de Julia, Olga, muere después de ser atropellada por un camión semirremolque mientras cruzaba la calle. En el funeral, Julia se aleja del ataúd de su hermana y observa el cuerpo de su hermana y lamenta el hecho de que Olga era la "perfecta hija mexicana" que nunca soñó con nada más que su aburrido trabajo y sentarse en casa con su Amá y Apá, su madre y padre. El público ve cómo se desarrolla la acción de la obra a través del subconsciente de Julia.

2. Después del funeral, Julia se mete a escondidas a la habitación de Olga. Julia intenta contactar a su hermana a través de sus pensamientos, y escuchamos a Olga representada como una serie de campanas de viento. Julia tropieza con la lencería escondida de Olga, una misteriosa nota que dice "Te amo" y una llave de la habitación del Hotel Continental. Amá descubre a Julia fisgoneando en la habitación de Olga y la castiga. Al día siguiente, Amá le dice a Julia que va a tener una fiesta de quinceañera aunque ya tiene quince años.

3. Julia visita tanto el Continental como la casa de Angie, la mejor amiga de Olga, en busca de respuestas, pero se queda con las manos vacías. Desanimada, se anima yendo a la casa de su mejor amiga Lorena con las esperanzas de distraerse fumando marihuana.

4. En la escuela, Julia almuerza con Lorena y las dos conocen a Juanga; Juanga y Lorena se llevan bien, mientras que a Julia le cuesta más adaptarse a él. Esa noche, Julia va a una fiesta con Lorena y Juanga donde se encuentra con Jazmyn, la amiga de la infancia de Olga. Jazmyn deja escapar que Olga estaba saliendo con alguien cuando murió, lo que Julia cree que podría estar relacionado con los objetos escondidos en la habitación de Olga.

5. Julia limpia casas con Amá y decide preguntarle por el novio de su hermana. Amá se molesta por las preguntas de Julia y termina castigando a Julia en lugar de creer que Olga tenía un novio secreto. Aunque Julia no encuentra consuelo en su madre, sí lo encuentra en la escuela con el Sr. Ingman, el profesor de Julia que enseña inglés, la materia favorita de Julia. Julia le revela que cree que la muerte de Olga fue culpa suya porque ella fue la razón por la que Olga tuvo que tomar el autobús en lugar de ser recogida por Amá. El Sr. Ingman intenta ayudar a Julia a ver que no tuvo ningún control sobre la muerte de Olga.

6. Bajo una inmensa presión y con una increíble falta de sueño, Julia estalla contra Angie, Amá y Apá durante su quinceañera. Su castigo es pasar el verano limpiando casas con Amá. El único aspecto positivo del verano es que Julia conoce a Connor, un guapo muchacho blanco de Evanston al que le gustan todas las cosas que le gustan a Julia. Los dos empiezan a salir.

7. Ha pasado un año desde la muerte de Olga y Julia sigue sin tener respuestas sobre los secretos que Olga guardaba. Luego, como si fuera magia, Julia encuentra la llave de la habitación de Olga en una caja vieja de gofres. Se mete a escondidas a la habitación de Olga y toma la lencería, la nota y la llave de la habitación del hotel.

8. Julia y Connor se acercan y se hacen más íntimos; deciden que están listos para tener sexo. Ambos tienen una experiencia positiva y hablan sobre el consentimiento y la protección. Julia experimenta muchas emociones diferentes después y está ansiosa por hablar con Lorena y Juanga sobre el tema al día siguiente.

9. Un día, Julia vuelve a casa y se entera de que Amá ha revisado su diario y ha arrancado todas las páginas con malas palabras. Todas sus anotaciones, poemas e historias han desaparecido. Amá también encuentra la lencería, la llave de la habitación y una nota. Julia es incapaz de decir la verdad sobre estos objetos -que pertenecían a Olga, no a ella-, así que Amá le quita el teléfono, la castiga y cierra con llave la habitación de Olga.

10. Después de semanas sin tener su teléfono, Connor cuestiona su relación con Julia porque no pueden comunicarse. Julia comienza a entrar en una espiral y se desconecta de todo: sus amigos, la escuela, Amá, Apá, todo. Incapaz de encontrar la alegría, y aún sufriendo por la pérdida de su hermana, Julia se siente impulsada a intentar la muerte por suicidio. Afortunadamente, sobrevive al intento porque Apá interfiere y rompe la puerta de su habitación después de llamarla repetidamente por su nombre y no escuchar una respuesta. Los padres de Julia la obligan a buscar ayuda psiquiátrica y ella encuentra conexión con su psiquiatra, Dr. Cooke.

11. Julia entra en el portátil de Olga y descubre que andaba con un hombre casado y con hijos. Los mensajes también le dicen que Olga estaba embarazada cuando murió. Sin saber cómo ayudar a su hija, los padres de Julia le dicen que visitará a su familia en México. Julia aborda un avión rumbo a México con los secretos de Olga. Mientras está allí, su abuelita le cuenta sobre la vida de sus padres en México y las dificultades y la violencia a las que se enfrentaron al cruzar la frontera hacia los Estados Unidos. Al volver a casa, Julia siente un nuevo aprecio por Amá y Apá.

12. Llegan las cartas de decisión universitaria de Julia y se entera de que ha obtenido una beca completa tanto para DePaul como para la Universidad de Nueva York. La UNY es la universidad de sus sueños y se inscribe allí. Cuando llega el momento de mudarse a Nueva York, Julia se despide de su Amá y Apá y, en el avión, conoce a una amable desconocida que se parece a Olga y que casualmente también se llama Olga. Julia utiliza el ultrasonido de Olga como separador de textos y dice: "Qué increíble es... que tenga parte de mi hermana aquí en mis manos". Julia mira y ve a su compañera de asiento, Olga, leyendo un libro titulado, "No Soy Tu Perfecta Hija Mexicana".

**Julia Here and Now: A Conversation with Steppenwolf Ensemble Member Karen Rodriguez   
Transcript**

**By Steppenwolf for Young Adults**

Featuring: Karen Rodriguez (Julia in *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*), Young Adult Council Alumna Tatiana B. and Young Adult Council Member Isabella B.

**Tatiana:**

Hey y’all! My name is Tatiana. My pronouns are she/her, and I am a Steppenwolf Young Adult Council alum.

**Isabella:**

Hi, my name is Isabella. My pronouns are she/her/hers, and I am a current Steppenwolf Teen Advisory Council member.

**Tatiana:**

And we are here today to interview the very lovely Karen. Why don’t you go ahead and introduce yourself?

**Karen:**

Hi everyone, my name is Karen Rodriguez, and my pronouns are she/her/hers. I am a Steppenwolf Ensemble Member, and I am playing Julia Reyes.

**Tatiana:**

We wanted to start out with a really cute icebreaker question. If you were on a deserted island, and you could only have one book, what would it be? And as a follow up to that, what book do you think Julia would choose?

**Karen:**

I think I am going to start with Julia. I think that question would be really heartbreaking for Julia because I don’t think she would be able to choose. Which is kind of a cop out but I think it’s the truth. She would be like ‘I don’t know, can I take 10?’ I think maybe 100 Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez as sort of a tongue and cheek kind of thing. Like ‘I’m alone on this island, let me read about this family.’ And then for me, I’m not as sophisticated as Julia. When you’re that age, I mean I was when I was that age. I feel like when you’re 15, when you’re just very young, or at least when I was, you’re trying to find your sense of purpose. And all those books really speak to you about what is to come. Cause at least for me, I just wanted to grow up. I wanted to feel like an adult and I wanted people to treat me like an adult. But now that I’m an adult, I just want to escape. So I’m sorry to say, but I just like suspense thrillers and funny British humor. So I feel like I would take Bridget Jones’ Diary or something like that. Cause I got to laugh and keep myself entertained.

**Tatiana:**

I feel like I would take Harry Potter.

**Karen:**

Thank you! Thank you so much.

**Isabella:**

Same. Honestly same. I mean if you’re in a terrible dire situation you got to escape.

**Karen:**

Exactly!

**Isabella:**

So could you tell us about your journey as an actor, and how you came to be an Ensemble Member at the Steppenwolf? Also, what does being an Ensemble Member mean for folks who do not know?

**Karen:**

So I started when I was 15. I had moved to the US three years prior, and I moved back to the north of Mexico. I was going to school across the border in Texas. My parents were like ‘we don’t want you to forget English! It’ll help you!’ Which I was like, ‘What the heck does that mean?’ And I was a very hyperactive child, I still am. My speech teacher at the time was starting a drama club - we didn’t have a drama club at the time at our school which she thought was a travesty. And was like “hey, would you like to come audition?” I was kind of the class clown kind of vibe. And she was like you obviously like the spotlight, would you like to come audition? And I had been a dancer for a really long time and when I came to the US I stopped dancing and my body changed. And I was no longer able to pursue that. Which is terrible and horrible for a child to understand that young. So I missed that kind of performative aspect. So, I auditioned and I fell in love with it. It was just a different way of being on stage but now with words instead of using my body. Then I’m very Type A. I graduated valedictorian, I went to UT Austin. I went to business school. I was like ‘I’m going to be an entrepreneur, maybe I’ll go to entertainment law, maybe I’ll go to law school.’ I mean, I just had all these kinds of interests. And I realized at business school that it was really sucking my soul, and I was really missing theater. So I double majored - only because that was the only way to audition. I didn't want to double major. I just wanted to do plays again. And from there I met all of these Chicago people who were like ‘You should move there.’ And I just kept hearing that over and over again and I don’t know what it was, but I believed them. I graduated, I told my parents. Literally we were packing up my stuff in my apartment. I had just graduated, I was going to go home to Mexico. I had had a conversation with [Isaac Gomez] who was my best friend - he adapted *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*. And he said, ‘I’m moving to Chicago are you in or are you out?’ And I was looking at my parents helping me pack this apartment in Austin up. I looked at them and I said, ‘Hey you guys, I think I’m going to Chicago to act.’ And you have to understand, I graduated from college with my business degree. I remember, my mom was like ‘qué!’ And my dad was just on his phone sitting in a chair and he said, ‘Um, I mean it’s your life.’ And it’s because they had fought so hard just for me to have that choice, right? So for him it was like ‘I mean, Godspeed, but if that’s what you want then go for it.’ So they helped me move to Chicago, and then I just started auditioning. And it was really meeting the right people. I think that’s literally the lesson of my career and of life. You can’t do this alone. And every single step I took in Chicago in order to get to being an Ensemble Member at Steppenwolf was the people that helped me, saw me, championed me, pushed me, and also opened doors for me. And now, it’s my turn. I’m not in the place I thought I would be. I thought I would be in my 50s before I was opening doors and championing people like that but it’s happening now and we need it now. So, yeah. That’s how I got here.

**Tatiana:**

Tell us what it means to be a Steppenwolf Ensemble Member.

**Karen:**

I think it means a lot of things. I think anywhere I go now that prestige follows me. They don’t even have to watch me, and that’s really invaluable, especially as an actor. I mean, you have to remember, I went to business school. So coming to Chicago and I would tell Isaac, he’s a writer, and I said, ‘Dude, I don’t know how the heck I’m going to do this. I feel like any other job you can bump into a director you’re interested in and - in business school we got taught elevator speeches - You can say I do this and I do that. How the hell am I going to do this as an actor? Do I just bust into a monologue? How do they know I can do this thing, right?’ I have to get into an audition room with that particular director. I have to get into a show and invite that particular director to sit their butt down and watch me do that show. It was very frustrating to me. How do you differentiate yourself from every other actor trying to do the same thing? So in that way, it’s been incredibly invaluable. And it’s still shocking to me. It’s also been, you know, to have a place that you can call home. I know that sounds kind of cheesy. But I can go and say to Anna, to JC, to any of the producers and say ‘I’m really interested in doing this play, or I’m really interested in doing this.’ And to have a home to even just say that. Where you can continue to mold and stretch your artistry. And to me, it’s the best place to do it in America. These actors are just something else and now I get to be a part of that legacy.

**Tatiana:**

Do you think that your personal experience has been changed or improved or in any way affected by that letter that went out last June? I think it was the Dear White American Theatre? Have you felt any effects from that directly that you feel comfortable talking about?

**Karen:**

I think it was an incredibly necessary step. I think it has affected my personal life because since that document came out and the White American Landscape woke up to something, because I’m part of Steppenwolf, I have been in a lot of rooms with a lot of conversations on how to employ those demands. And make a more inclusionary and diverse, and just art that actually reflects the world. That’s actually what that document is asking for. It’s asking for ‘Hey, tell our stories and let us tell our stories, and give us the resources. And let me not be the only one in the room to represent a whole community. And let me have a space - this is a job.’ I think sometimes we forget that because we make art and because we are actors and creators, and it’s fun. We get to play make believe’ for a job. We forget it’s a job. And we need all of those things that come with a job, which is just a safe workplace.

**Tatiana:**

Yeah.

**Karen:**

A work place where we are not diminished for any kind of identity that we identify with. A place where we are not harassed, sexually or otherwise. I mean it’s really, when you break it down, it’s just asking for decency, and for space. So, yeah it’s affecting my life in the way that we have been having these conversations. But I’m interested to see what happens if and when we come back into the actual building - any building, any theater. And see if these practices are actually employed. I think the conversations are still ongoing.

**Isabella:**

So, this show centers around a very specific Mexican narrative. So why do you think it’s important to bring those cultural aspects to a wider audience?

**Karen:**

I mean, I think it ties with what I just said. I think about this project and it’s based on a book written by Erika Sanchez who is speaking from that experience. It’s adapted by Isaac, directed by [Sandra Marquez], with a full cast that speaks from that experience. I just think - I mean, I think *La Ruta* is the only other show where I have experienced that. Where across the board, as far as the creatives are concerned, are speaking from that experience. So basically, what I’m saying is ‘Tell our stories and let us tell it.’ And also, I’m sorry that’s such a huge question. To be reflected. This kind of language is so pervasive at this point. But it really is true, I have seen it. I have seen it with you, Tatiana, we have had so many of these conversations. I have seen it with so many young people coming up to me after this show, after *La Ruta*, after anything I have done. I started acting in Chicago when I was 23-years old. So, at 23, being a professional actor in Chicago, people who were 17 - only six years apart, coming up to me and being like ‘You’ve changed my life.’ It’s beautiful, and also such a huge pressure. Everything that I do, and everything that all of us do, because there’s a scarcity, we are not allowed to live in abundance. And also, I think it’s important for these stories to be told because I think people of all identities - all walks of life, we have to start being comfortable with seeing stories that may not directly and immediately speak to us, but that actually, it’s a human experience and there’s always value. In fact, I would argue there’s more value when you hear a story that at first seemingly, you think, is not like your own. And actually, if you sit through it, sit through the discomfort, you will find that it is your story as well.

**Tatiana:**

Let me just write that down really quick.

**Isabella:**

Yeah, woah.

**Karen:**

So that’s why it’s important! Let’s do it!

**Isabella:**

You have done this show in person before. Can you talk to us a little bit about how your process for an in-person show is different, or similar, to this audio process?

**Karen:**

Oh man, that is the question! It’s been super different. It’s been bizarre. Again, you can find value in any single thing if you are really just present with the moment. Here’s what I’ll say - Julia is particularly a difficult role in this particular form because she is quite Jacobian. What I mean by that is that she says one thing but she is actually feeling another or the exact opposite. That’s because she’s someone who is grieving and also going through clinical depression. So you can say ‘I’m fine,’ and actually you’re not fine. I had the pleasure - not the pleasure, but the gift. That’s why the stage play was so awesome to be in. Because to me, that conversation is so important - particularly for our community. And to be able to show, because in the play and in the audio form, you’re able to hear her thoughts. You’re able to hear her inner life. But what was cool about the stage play was there was a tension because she was telling you her inner life and then you got to watch her go plug into her life and see the actual tension of her being with a person and telling them that she’s fine, or telling them, ‘Please don’t do this to me I don’t want this *quinceanera*’, and understand that when she says that, it’s so much heavier. It’s not just some petulant kid saying, ‘I don’t want that.’ She is saying, ‘Don’t do this to me, you are breaching my boundary, and I am very clearly telling you that this is a boundary for me, please don’t breach it,’ and they don’t care. And so you start to feel the tension because you are hearing her inner life and the turmoil and then seeing these scenes in which she is not exactly articulating because that’s what happens. Julia doesn’t have the language to say, ‘I’m depressed and therefore A, B, and C.’ I don’t think that’s how anyone goes through that. I certainly have gone through that and I can be self-aware, but you don’t even realize when you’re doing it. How that clinical depression affects you, and how you communicate and how you present yourself. So anyway, that being said, there’s a challenge there in the audio form. Because she’s quite irreverent and she deflects a lot. She’s like ‘I’m fine!’ She does it with humor and she does it with spunk, and she does it with ferociousness sometimes. So how do we clue in? Even in her inner life she’s still picking herself up. It’s been interesting, and I miss things about the stage production. We are not going to see the dance and the quince, and I loved watching everyone in the audience. I got to watch everyone because I was talking to you all, or when I danced with my dad at the quince and people would just weep. It was so fun to do that to you all! But I think that the audio is going to be a more intense, and a more - not truthful, but you won’t get the distraction of her life. You’re just going to get her. So, there’s an intense focus on her [point of view] and what she’s really going through. So, I’m really excited about that.

**Isabella:**

Mental health is such an important theme in this show, and the author of this book, Erika Sánchez, has said that. Latinas are often told that we are not allowed to take care of ourselves. So, considering that mental health is so stigmatized in the Mexican community, how do you think this story can help open up conversations for listeners in the community?

**Karen:**

I hope that it does! I hope that getting therapy becomes de-stigmatized. I know for sure growing up in my family, going to therapy, that was considered when you’re a *loca*. That’s when you go. It took me years to undo that for myself. To understand that - like how are people obsessed with going to the gym and obsessed with their physical fitness? Which is healthy, I don’t do it, but good for them. How do we not think of therapy as going to the gym for your mind?

**Tatiana:**

There’s something to be said too about how in the book itself, Julia doesn’t get mental health help until after she has attempted suicide. At that point her parents can recognize that she’s crazy -well, crazy is a derogatory term, but at that point they can understand why she would need it. But she’s been needing it this entire time. Her sister has been dead and before that, it’s hinted that she’s always been depressed and anxious beyond that. So, I don’t know what kind of narrative that pushes, but it’s a realistic narrative.

**Karen:**

She cannot say ‘Hey, I’m depressed and having suicidal ideation.’ She may not be able to say that, because she herself is still coming to terms with what’s inside of her. But what she does say constantly is, ‘You’re breaching me. Please don’t do this. Please don’t take my phone away. Please don’t do this *quinceanera.* Please feed me. I know that you lost your daughter but I’m still here. I don’t want to go to this party, Lorena.’ At the *quince* she says it. ‘I’m not okay.’ I think that oftentimes, someone who has lived through a very intense depression - that’s why I say that all of us have to start making mental health and the education of mental health not a taboo thing. Because it’s up to all of us not to downplay when people say that. It doesn’t come from people saying, ‘I’m going to downplay your feelings.’ It comes from - I think, from a fear of ‘I want to take that feeling away from you! I’m sure you’re tired.’ I have said before ‘I’m not okay’ and people have said ‘oh that’s because you’re stressed.’ It is a form of gaslighting because you’re like, ‘How else can I say it?’ I remember this particular time in my life when I would say these things to three different people. And they all - bless their souls, they all were like, ‘Let me take that away from you immediately,’ not ‘let me sit with what you just said.’ And then I’m silent on the phone just being like, ‘Did you just hear?’ Yes they heard me, so yes it must just be me. Then you just take it upon yourself and take it upon yourself. You’re so right Tatiana - it shouldn’t be after the attempt that you wake up to it. One of the things that I have heard a lot of people talk about is the transformation that Julia has in her understanding of her parents and where they come from. And why they might be the way they are because of those things that happened to them. In particular her mom and her dad when he stopped being an artist. People always talk about that but to me, it’s actually a parallel transformation. It’s also because she sees her parents in a new light and has to grow up quite quickly and understand that about her parents. It’s a symbiotic relationship. They also understand something new about her - because she learns that after her attempt. They are able to see each other slowly and gradually, but parallel to each other. It’s not a one-sided transformation and it’s both growing with each other. I think we did this in the play, but it was much more subtle. It’s going to be an ongoing journey as they try to meet each other. All those times her mom was so - in her mind, and not just in her mind, her mom is hard. Those things are not undone. There’s probably still things in the behavior of the mom, and also being 18, like ‘Mom, don’t you think I know this already?’ That’s behavior that she has done to you your whole life and that’s why - therapy! therapy! Because the trigger is different to you. Her trigger is what she lived through and your trigger is she has dismissed you your whole life and treated you like you don’t know what you're doing. Its ships missing each other again. And it’s not perfect. Sometimes she will succeed, and other times she won’t, and it’s just going to get better as she goes. I think. I hope. That’s what we are all trying to do.

**Isabella:**

Well on that note, we want to thank you so much Karen! For being with us today, and for giving us this opportunity to talk to you!

**Karen:**

Thank you for your beautiful questions, I wish we could just - we should just keep going! They won't hear what we're saying but -- hahahahahah. Thank you y'all! Thank you!

**Tatiana:**

Thank you!