

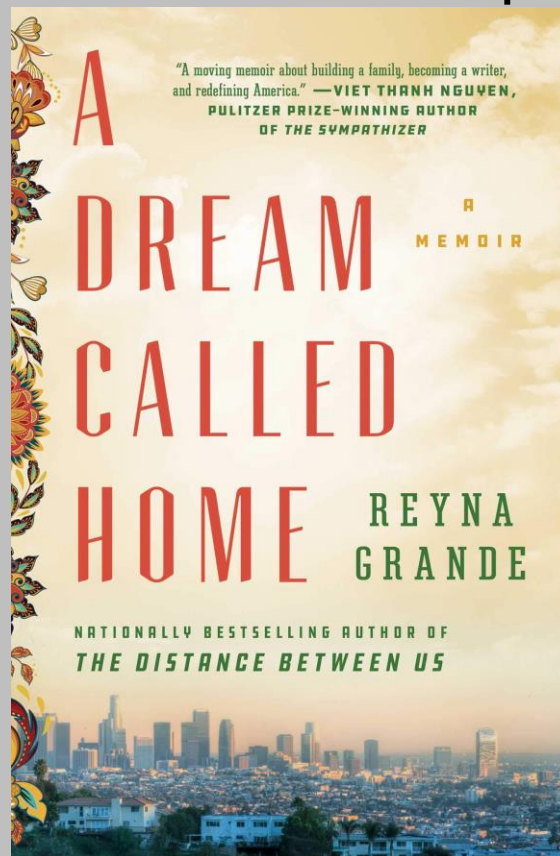
2020-2021



Academic and  
Career Success

# Common Reading Program

SLS 1501: First-Year Experience



## **A Resource Guide:**

Integrating *A Dream Called Home* into the Classroom

# 2020-2021 Common Reading Program

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>About the Common Reading Program.....</b>	<b>2-3</b>
- Mission	
- What is the FIU Common Reading Program?	
- Why has FIU instituted a common reading program?	
- Common Reading History	
- How was this book selected?	
- Recommend a Book	
- How will this book be used in classes?	
- What should students do before the first day of classes?	
- Common Reading Essay Contest and Submission Link	
- Essay Prompt	
<b>About the Author/Author Visit Information.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Topic Breakdown of the Course.....</b>	<b>5-8</b>
<b>Additional Questions for Discussion.....</b>	<b>9-10</b>
<b>Frost Art Museum Exhibit.....</b>	<b>11</b>

**Thank you for all your contributions toward making the Common Reading Program a successful experience for our students!**

# 2020-2021 Common Reading Program

## ABOUT THE COMMON READING PROGRAM

### **Mission**

The Common Reading Program affords students the opportunity of participating in a common curricular experience that creates community and a common ground for discussion. The program is tailored specifically for incoming first year students. Students are expected to have read the book before the first day of class and will join together with faculty and peers to discuss and think critically about key concepts. The Common Reading Program will encourage students to partake in intellectual engagement and will create a sense of community among newly admitted Panthers.

### **What is the FIU Common Reading Program?**

The FIU Common Reading Program is targeted specifically at incoming first year students as an introduction to the academic expectations of the University. It is an effort to create a shared intellectual point of engagement for first year students and create a sense of community. As FIU first-year students, they will read the selected common reading book before the first day of class. Faculty and staff also read the book and engage students and others in discussions that challenge all to think critically about the text.

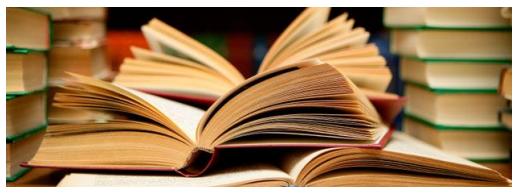
### **Why has FIU instituted a common reading program?**

Common reading programs are increasingly popular features of first year programs at colleges and universities across the nation. After our pilot program in 2008, both students and instructors in our first year seminars reported a high level of communal and academic engagement as a result of integrating the common reading into the curriculum.

### **Common Reading History**

- Determined (2019-2020)
- A Stone of Hope (2018-2019)
- The Promise of a Pencil (2017-2018)
- In Order to Live (2016-2017)
- The Prince of Los Cucuyos (2015-2016)
- No Turning Back (2014-2015)
- Wine to Water (2013-2014)
- I'm Down (2012-2013)
- The Red Umbrella (2011-2012)
- A Chant to Soothe Wild Elephants (2010-2011)
- Funny in Farsi (2009-2010)

For more details concerning each Common Reading book, including book descriptions and videos of past author visits please go to this link: <https://acs.fiu.edu/initiatives/common-reading/index.html>



### **How was this book selected?**

The Common Reading Committee has faculty, staff, and student representation. After a number of books were recommended, several books were carefully reviewed and discussed. Before making a final determination the Committee members considered a variety of factors including interest, cost, readability, length, and applicability to our student population. All University community members are encouraged to make a suggestion for next year's program.

# 2020-2021 Common Reading Program

## Recommend a Book

All University community members are invited to make a suggestion for the common reading book selection. A variety of factors including cost, readability, length, and applicability to our student population are taken into consideration before a final selection is made. The student learning outcomes for the Common Reading Program are as follows:

- Model intellectual engagement by participating in a shared academic experience within the first year seminar
- Create a sense of community
- Demonstrate an understanding of diverse perspectives by exploring the distinct and/or common qualities in one's own perspectives and those of others.
- Develop interest in reading and textual exploration.
- Please visit this link to submit a recommendation:

<https://acs.fiu.edu/initiatives/common-reading/the-book/index.html>

## How will this book be used in classes?

The First Year Experience Seminar course has incorporated the common reading book into its curriculum. Students will be tested on material from the common reading book, and they will also write a paper using critical thinking skills to relate a character, event, or theme of the book to their own life. Professors of other courses may choose to incorporate the book into their curriculum and/or classroom discussions.

## What should students do before the first day of class?

- Read the book.
- Join our [Facebook page](#) (FIU Common Reading).
- Frequently check our calendar of events:

<https://acs.fiu.edu/initiatives/common-reading/events/index.html>

## Common Reading Essay Contest and Submission Link

Every year, first year students are welcome to submit their essays for the Common Reading Essay Contest. The essay contest (with cash prizes) will be held in the Spring semester. Students will be able to upload their essays beginning in the Summer via this link: <https://library.fiu.edu/commonreading>.

## Essay Prompt

Reyna's story highlights the importance of resilience and determination when it comes to finding her place in America as a first-generation Latina university student and aspiring writer. Using your critical thinking skills, select a theme, character, or event from Reyna's story that you can relate to, and write a 2-3 page reflective essay. Be sure to include examples from Reyna's life and your life, and how you can relate the two.

# 2020-2021 Common Reading Program

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR/AUTHOR VISIT

### Reyna Grande



Reyna Grande is the author of the bestselling memoir, *The Distance Between Us*, (Atria, 2012) where she writes about her life before and after she arrived in the United States from Mexico as an undocumented child immigrant. The much-anticipated sequel, *A Dream Called Home* (Atria), was released in 2018. Her other works include the novels, *Across a Hundred Mountains*, (Atria, 2006) and *Dancing with Butterflies* (Washington Square Press, 2009) which were published to critical acclaim. *The Distance Between Us* is also available as a

young readers edition from Simon & Schuster's Children's Division—Aladdin. Her books have been adopted as the common read selection by schools, colleges and cities across the country.

Reyna has received an American Book Award, the El Premio Aztlán Literary Award, and the International Latino Book Award. In 2012, she was a finalist for the prestigious National Book Critics Circle Awards, and in 2015 she was honored with a Luis Leal Award for Distinction in Chicano/Latino Literature. The young reader's version of *The Distance Between Us* received a 2017 Honor Book Award for the Américas Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature and a 2016 Eureka! Honor Awards from the California Reading Association, and an International Literacy Association Children's Book Award 2017. Writing about immigration, family separation, language trauma, the price of the American Dream, and her writing journey, Reyna's work has appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Dallas Morning News*, CNN, *The Lily* at *The Washington Post*, *Buzzfeed*, among others.

Reyna is a proud member of the Macondo Writer's Workshop founded by Sandra Cisneros, where she has also served as faculty. She has also taught at the Bread Loaf Writers Conference and VONA (Voices of Our Nation's Arts). Currently, she is at work on a novel set during the Mexican-American War.

Born in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico (where 43 college students disappeared in 2014), Reyna was two years old when her father left for the U.S. to find work. Her mother followed her father north two years later, leaving Reyna and her siblings behind in Mexico. In 1985, when Reyna was nine, she left Iguala to make her own journey north. After attending Pasadena City College for two years, Reyna became the first person in her family to set foot in a university. She went on to obtain a B.A. in creative writing and film & video from the University of California, Santa Cruz. She later received her M.F.A. in creative writing from Antioch University.

### Author Visit

Author Reyna Grande will be speaking at FIU

**Summer or Fall 2020  
TBD**

**Please consider giving extra credit for students to attend the author visit and encourage your Peer Mentor to go with your students.**



# 2020-2021 Common Reading Program

## WEEKLY BREAKDOWN OF THE COURSE

### **Week 1: Mental Health**

Throughout *A Dream Called Home*, Reyna faces big life changes and some challenging decisions. For example, the book opens with Reyna narrating her journey north to attend a university for the first time, where she explains some of the conflict she feels over leaving her family behind in Los Angeles to pursue her dream of becoming a writer. Reyna also struggles in her relationship with her father, who was abusive to her and her siblings growing up. Her father constantly told her that she would never make anything of herself or be able to finish school. Reyna felt the need to prove herself and defy all the expectations of her family. First year students may face similar life changes when leaving their families behind for the first time or choosing to pursue a certain path in college that their family may disagree with.

In Class: Discuss with students how changes they may be experiencing can have an impact on mental health, what resources are offered at FIU (e.g. Counseling and Psychology Services (CAPS) and Victim Empowerment Program), and that they should not be afraid or ashamed to use them to help them cope and stay mentally healthy.

### **Week 2: Time Management**

When Reyna was in college and had her sister Betty living with her, time management was essential to her success. After Reyna had a son and began to raise him on her own, Reyna also had to manage the pursuit of her writing career and completion of her master's degree. She not only learned how to manage her time, but also learned the value of it.

In Class: Discuss with students how Reyna managed her time and ask them to provide similar examples of ways they can manage their other responsibilities such as work and family along with school. Also lead a discussion on what it means to value your time, and how to manage it based on the value we each assign to the time we have.

### **Week 3: Stress Management**

Reyna had to deal with plenty of stress throughout her transition to college. Not only did she move away from home and her family, but she also had to carry the complete financial burden of school and all of her living expenses. When she first arrived at UC Santa Cruz, she struggled to make friends and also struggled in her classes. She felt different and alone because it was hard for her to relate to her non-Latinx classmates and professors. After college, she dealt with the stress of finding a job to support herself and then her son. Reyna also dealt with the stress of the guilt she felt over her decision to distance herself from her family.

In Class: Discuss stressors with students and how they can impact their transition to FIU. The transition to college can be stressful for many first-year students, especially those who may, like Reyna, be struggling with finances, familial relationships, cultural identity, and making friends. Have students come up with ways to cope with these different stressors, including things like joining clubs and organizations at FIU to get involved, make friends, and create healthy outlets for stress.

### **Week 4: Relationships**

Relationships are a major theme in Reyna's life and in *A Dream Called Home*. Reyna does not give up trying to reconcile her relationships with her father, mother, and her siblings while trying to establish her new-found independence at the University of Santa Cruz. Reyna's relationships with her mentors, such as her instructor Marta Navarro, also played an important role in her education and career. Her strained relationships with her family



# 2020-2021 Common Reading Program

members taught her about her own strength and ability to persevere even when those you love the most may not believe that you can. Her relationships with her mentors provided her with the support she needed in order to get to a place where she believed in herself enough to take those steps toward independence. Reyna also struggled at first to make friends, especially because she felt that there were no other students who could relate to her cultural background as a Latina. Eventually, however, she was able to make friends with her roommates. One of her roommates even took her to a protest on campus where Reyna learned that there were plenty of other Latinx and minority students who she could relate to her. This helped her to feel less alone. From there, Reyna began to have an easier time finding her place in school. She even joined a folklórico dance group which helped her feel more connected. Finally, Reyna also struggled with some unhealthy relationships with romantic partners throughout her adulthood as well. She had an unhealthy relationship with the man who would eventually become her father's son, Francisco.

In Class: Discuss with students some of Reyna's relationships, and how their relationships will play a role in their transition to college and beyond. It is important to establish the difference between good and bad relationships and how they can affect people both positively and negatively.

To prepare students to write their essay, also have them discuss themes from the book (as a class or in small groups). Here is a list of some themes in *A Dream Called Home*:

Immigration	First Generation	Family
Abandonment	Culture	Inequality
Tradition	Opportunity	Relationships
Sacrifice	Education	Mental Health
Socioeconomic Status	Culture Shock	Heritage
Belonging	Strength	Forgiveness
Resilience	Work/Life Balance	Determination
Expectations	Independence	Identity
American Dream		

## Week 5: Common Reading

In Class: Have students discuss with the class what they wrote about in their essays.

Optional: Show this video on *A Dream Called Home* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7G2aj329QLc>

You can also have students read one of the following articles written by Reyna herself:

[A Migrant's Story](#)

[Immigration and Transformation: My Literary Metamorphosis](#)

[The Trauma of Immigrating Didn't Stop When I Crossed the Border](#)

## Week 7: Life Skills Wrap Up

Since Reyna was on her own during her time at the University of Santa Cruz, she had to develop important life skills in order to be responsible for her own success. Some of these skills have been discussed in class previously, such as when she learned to manage her mental health, or time and stress management. Reyna also had to learn how to find affordable housing, deal with roommates, and find ways to eat healthy on a budget. An example of another very important life skill Reyna had to learn and develop is financial literacy. Since her family did not contribute financially to her education, Reyna had to navigate financial aid, paying for housing, and finding a job to support herself.

In Class: Discuss with students some of the life skills Reyna had to develop and have them explain how they can use these life skills in their academic, personal, and professional lives.

# 2020-2021 Common Reading Program

## **Week 8: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills**

While Reyna attended college and grew into adulthood at a different time than your students, she too had to adapt to an ever changing and developing society. Being a first-generation college student especially presented Reyna with its own unique challenges, such as being exposed to certain social issues for the first time. Reyna's roommate, Carolyn, takes her to a demonstration on campus where minority students were protesting Prop 209, a proposition that passed, doing away with affirmative action in California. For the first time, Reyna considers how her identity as a Latina woman impacted her admission to a four-year university. This also helped her to meet other students she could relate to and support social issues she cared about with them.

In Class: Have students pick an issue that affects them or the world around them and discuss how this may impact them. For example, the debate around affirmative action still continues in many universities across the country. There are also issues surrounding immigration such as revisions to the DREAM Act that make it harder for people to qualify, as well as the issues of children being detained at our borders and being separated from their families.

## **Week 9: Creativity**

Reyna's creativity and ability to think outside the box are what made it possible for her to pursue her dreams and the life she always wanted for herself. Reyna's creative writing is what carried her through college, graduate school, and all the way to fulfilling her dream of becoming a writer. Reyna also joined a folklórico dance group in college, which was another important creative outlet for her. She even used her knowledge of dance in her professional career as a teacher to start a dance group with her students. Reyna's ability and willingness to express and explore her thoughts, emotions, and life experiences through her stories made her realize that she was meant to continue to share her stories with others, to help empower them the way she was empowered through reading her favorite writers.

In Class: Discuss with students how thinking creatively can help them both in challenging situations as well as in their everyday life in college.

## **Week 10: Collaboration**

Reyna had to work together with others in order to persevere when she felt like giving up. After making the difficult decision to kick her sister Betty out of their shared apartment and removing Betty from her life for the time being, she returned to her studies with a newfound determination. Her instructor Marta was there to give her the support and push she needed. Marta was the first person to suggest that Reyna should publish her short story collection, and then give her the guidance she needed in order to do just that. Reyna also had her writing group after she was accepted into the Emerging Voices writing fellowship program. This collaboration with her peers, who were all working towards similar goals, was very important to her success.

In Class: Throughout their time in college, students will need to collaborate with others in order to persevere through hard times or to gain access to opportunities they wouldn't have otherwise. Have students discuss the importance of collaboration.

## **Week 11: Design Thinking**

In Class: How can design thinking be used by organizations and programs promoting awareness and education of issues relating to some of the themes explored in *A Dream Called Home*, such as immigration, class disparity, and issues of access to higher education (students who are undocumented, come from a lower socioeconomic upbringing, do not speak English, etc. have a harder time accessing higher education)?



# 2020-2021 Common Reading Program

## **Weeks 12-13: Opportunity/Course Wrap Up**

**Opportunity:** Reyna takes her life experiences as an immigrant who survived a dangerous border crossing, a survivor of childhood abuse, a first-generation college student and graduate, and turns them into an opportunity to spread education and awareness. Discuss with students how they can draw on their personal experiences to create opportunities in their own lives.

**Course Wrap Up:** Reyna has devoted her life to teaching others and sharing her message with the world. She is passionate about sharing her experience, even though it was difficult for her at first, because she realizes the importance of education on these issues, especially for other immigrant children and families. It is her legacy. Have students reflect on what they are passionate about and how these passions can play into their future, and even their time here at FIU. Encourage them to seek out involvement opportunities on campus related to their interests and passions.

# 2020-2021 Common Reading Program

## **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

Reading Group Guide provided by Simon & Schuster

<https://www.simonandschuster.net/books/A-Dream-Called-Home/Reyna-Grande/9781501171437>

1. Discuss the epigraph that begins *A Dream Called Home*. Why do you think Grande has chosen to begin her memoir with this quote? How does it help you understand her as both an immigrant and an author?
2. Although Reyna Grande's hometown, Iguala de la Independencia, has a rich history, it is a poor city where over 70 percent of the population is living in poverty. As a child, Grande writes that she "had been able to see past the imperfections and find the beauty of my hometown." (p. 46) What are some of the moments of beauty that she finds? Describe Grande's visits back to Iguala. How does the way that Grande sees her hometown evolve when she returns?
3. Grande writes "My biggest virtue and my biggest flaw was the tenacity with which I clung to my dreams, no matter how futile they might seem to others." (p. 5) Explain her statement. Why does Grande see this quality in herself as both negative and positive? How does this trait serve her? What are some of the dreams that Grande holds on to?
4. After Reyna learns the word "impervious," she "knew it was a word I wanted to be defined by." (p. 74) Why does the word appeal to Reyna? Do you think that it is an apt description of her personality? Why or why not? If you could only define yourself with one word, what would you choose? Explain your answer.
5. Although "Where are you from?" is an "innocent question," Grande writes that it "always confused me when asked by a white person." (p. 11) Why is the question such a charged one for Reyna and other immigrants? When Reyna is asked where she's from by other Latino students, her reaction is different. Why?
6. Grande writes having "the name Reyna Grande, 'the big queen,' when you are only five feet tall sets you up for a lifetime of ridicule." (p. 29) In what other ways does Reyna's name affect the way that people perceive her? Describe her reaction to being called "Renée Grand" by one of her teachers at UCSC. What appeal does having an Anglicized name hold for her? Why does she resist it?
7. When Reyna returns to Mexico and visits her family, her young cousin is fascinated with her life in America and asks if she lives in Disneyland. Reyna thinks, "I didn't live in Disneyland, but I did live in a magical place." (p. 228) Why does she see America as a magical place despite all of the hardships that she's encountered since immigrating? Did reading about Reyna's experience as an immigrant change your perspective about life in the United States?
8. When visiting Betty in Mexico, Reyna wonders "why both Betty and I had an unhealthy need to be loved and wanted by men." (p. 53) What does she think the root cause for this trait is? How has the sisters' childhood affected the way they handle themselves as adults? Describe some of the ways that both Betty and Reyna have attempted to cope with their traumatic upbringings.
9. Why does Reyna decide to take a Spanish for Spanish Speakers class? When Reyna confides in Marta, her instructor, about her feelings of inadequacy when visiting Mexico, Marta tells her, "It isn't that you aren't enough. In fact, the opposite is true." (p. 96) What does she mean? Does Marta's perspective help Reyna to reframe her experience? In what ways?

# 2020-2021 Common Reading Program

10. While Reyna is enrolled at UCSC, she takes a summer job as part of the maintenance crew at Kresge College. Ironically, although Reyna “had hoped to forget my father . . . my work on the paint crew brought me closer to him.” (p. 100) Describe the work that Reyna and her crewmates are tasked with. How does this work give Reyna new insight into her father?
11. Seeing Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston speak is a watershed moment for Reyna. She writes that the experience leads her to “fully grasp what a writer did.” (p. 128) Why does Reyna find Wakatsuki’s appearance and her story so empowering? What is the role of the writer according to Reyna? Does she embody this ideal? If so, how?
12. When Reyna is having difficulty finding employment, Norma advises her to apply for a job as a seasonal worker in a clothing store telling her that “a job is a job.” (p. 154) Why is Reyna resistant to apply? What would you do if you were in her position? Why do her siblings give her a hard time about the position?
13. How does Mago react when Reyna tells her that she’s planning on going back to school to take writing classes? Were you surprised by Mago’s reaction? Reyna tells Mago that she’s “doing this for both of us.” (p. 208) Why is it so important for Reyna to go back to school? In what ways does it help her and Nathan?
14. Before Reyna begins teaching, she reflects upon her favorite teachers, trying to determine what about their methods she can imitate. What does Reyna admire about Diana, Marta, and Micah? What makes them successful teachers? What did you think of Reyna’s teaching methods? What challenges does she face as a new teacher? Is she able to connect with her students? If so, how?
15. When Reyna mails her application for the Emerging Voices program, Diana says “This is going to change your life” (p. 215). Why do you think Diana was so certain that Reyna would be accepted? Did Reyna have as much belief in her future? Think of an event that changed the course of your life. Did you recognize the importance of the event at the time or only in hindsight? How would your life be different today had this event not occurred?
16. Reyna chooses to turn down the book offer from the editor who wants to make her protagonist U.S.-born. Why was it so important to Reyna to keep her main character an immigrant? Would you have made the same choice? Why or why not? What other difficult choices does Reyna make throughout the memoir? What difficult choices have you made in your life?
17. Grande writes of the moment when she first held her published book. “I had finally built a home that I could carry.” (p. 316) What do you think she means by this? What other “homes” does Reyna build? What does the title *A Dream Called Home* mean to you?

**FROST ART MUSEUM**

[Frost.fiu.edu](http://Frost.fiu.edu)

Exhibit Coming Soon for Fall 2020!