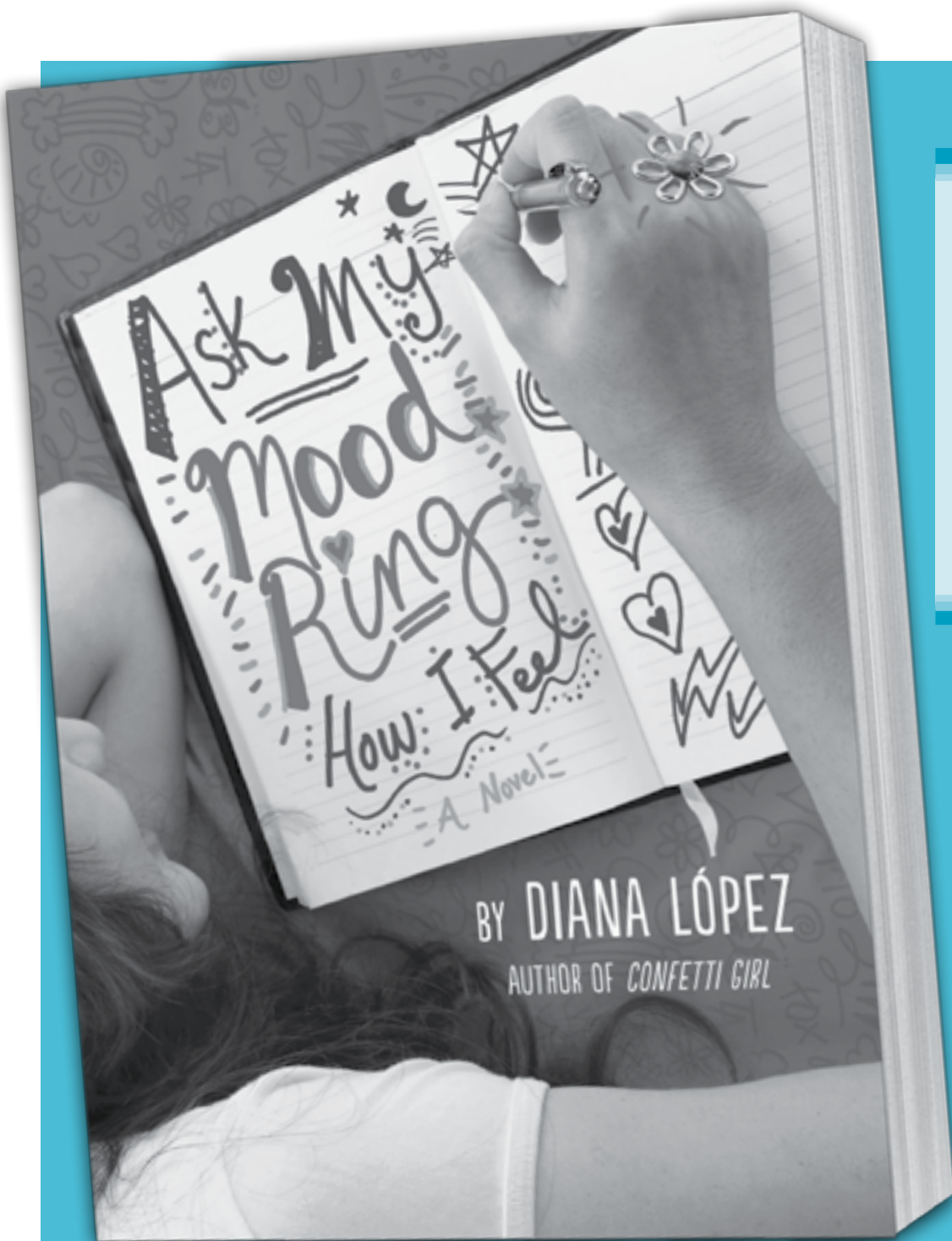


ASK MY *Mood Ring* HOW I FEEL



curriculum connections

- ❖ Family Life
- ❖ Diseases, Illnesses, & Injuries
- ❖ Hispanic & Latino Heritage

Grades: 8 - 12

BY DIANA LÓPEZ

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The novel, *Ask My Mood Ring How I Feel*, is narrated in first person by Erica “Chia” Montenegro. Describe Erica’s “voice” as a narrator. What makes it unique? How does hearing the story from her point of view affect your experience of the novel?
2. Early on, we see that Erica believes in being self-sufficient and not asking for anyone’s help. What’s more, she takes on additional responsibilities to help her friends and family. What are the good deeds and additional tasks Erica does for her friends, siblings, and parents, respectively? How does this behavior ultimately affect Erica?
3. Erica struggles with the idea of a *promesa*, thinking it sounds like her family is “bribing God” to help them. Explain in your own words what a *promesa* is—how does the author’s letter at the end of the book help you to better understand *promesas*? What advice would you give to Erica when she feels that her *promesa* is not working or inadequate?
4. Each member of the Montenegro family deals with the reality of Lisa’s cancer differently. Describe each character’s coping mechanism, and explain whether you believe it is a healthy strategy for dealing with the stress.
5. As a thirteen-year-old, breasts are already an issue at the forefront of Erica’s mind. Lisa’s breast cancer diagnosis and subsequent mastectomy only complicate the matter. Describe Erica’s mixed feelings about breasts. Why is it important that Lisa brings Erica bra shopping after her surgery? What does Erica learn, and how does it help her allay her younger sister Carmen’s insecurities about developing?
6. Erica becomes very upset when Iliana gives away her beloved Chia Pets to the children at the hospital. Explain why this upsets her so much. What do the Chia Pets mean to Erica? How does Erica ultimately come to terms with giving these objects away, and what does this act represent?
7. Derek’s highly anticipated party is a significant turning point for multiple relationships in Erica’s life. Describe how the events at the party affect her relationship with and/or toward GumWad, Carmen, and Derek.
8. When Erica and her parents are called into school for a meeting, her teachers explain that Erica is a “divergent thinker.” What does this mean? Apart from the negative impact on her math work, can you think of other, more positive examples of Erica’s divergent thinking? Do you think that Carmen is a divergent thinker? Why or why not?
9. Consider the title *Ask My Mood Ring How I Feel*. Why does Erica need to rely on her mood ring to gauge her emotions? Why do you think Erica is resistant in seeking or receiving emotional support from her friends or family?
10. As boy crazy as Erica is, she ironically never notices the boy right under her nose: Roberto, aka GumWad. Describe Roberto from Erica’s point of view. What admirable qualities does Roberto have? What do you think prevents Erica from seeing these qualities? How does Erica and Roberto’s relationship change by the end of the book?
11. Cancer is a difficult topic that not everyone feels comfortable discussing. Yet, the author covers the whole experience: from Lisa’s surgery and shopping for her prosthetic breast to radiation treatments and side effects. Describe how the author approaches this sensitive subject. How does this approach make you feel as a reader?
12. To pay it forward means to repay a good deed to someone else. Explain how Patty’s grandfather and his neighbors participate in their own form of paying it forward. What do Patty and Erica find so unappealing about the relationships among the people in this neighborhood? Witnessing this community is the beginning of an important lesson about community for Erica that is strengthened at the Race for the Cure walk. What does Erica learn? How might the story have been different if Erica had accepted this idea about community earlier on?

Activities/Projects

1. Ask students to use the idea of Erica’s mood ring as inspiration for their own works of art. Have students select any medium (collage, painting, drawing, sculpture) to create a piece that symbolically represents their own varying emotional states. Have students share their “mood rings” in small groups.

2. Erica takes great pride in her witty t-shirts and uses them as a way to express her personality. Explain to students that many of Erica's t-shirts are funny because they employ a pun, i.e., a play on words. Have students design their own t-shirt, expressing their individual sense of humor. They may want to feature a pun such as Erica's "Yeti or not, her I come" or "bad hare day" t-shirts. Alternatively, students may want to design a t-shirt using a visual joke only such as Erica's t-shirt with the conjoined Siamese cats.

3. Erica has a way with words. Have groups of students search the book for all of the similes, metaphors, and other figures of speech Erica uses, compiling a list. Each student should then choose his/her favorite figure of speech. Ask students to interpret the phrase and then pictorially convey the meaning. Allow students to create their own original figures of speech based on the examples they find. For example on page 3 Erica hyperbolically says, "there were a lot of things I'd rather do than take Carmen's side—like sleep on a block of ice or drink tomato sauce with crushed Oreos." Challenge students to come up with even less appealing exaggerations.

4. The Montenegro family demonstrates that coping with a family member's cancer diagnosis and treatment can be incredibly stressful. Have students research healthy coping strategies and create an informational brochure in which they outline tips and skills for those with a loved one battling cancer.

5. Use Mrs. Gardner's service-oriented project as an inspiration for your own students and discuss with them the idea of paying it forward. Have students brainstorm projects they can take on within the school or their community such as Shawntae's election awareness project, or Patty's repurposing trash project. Allow students to work individually or in groups. Perhaps your class can start a school-wide campaign encouraging random acts of kindness!

6. In groups, have students decide on a topic from the novel that they are interested in learning more about. For instance, students may want to research the Virgen de San Juan del Valle shrine, the story of the Amazon women, methods for interpreting dreams, various cancer treatments,

signs of depression, or what exactly is going on with Carmen's obsessive counting. Have groups present the information they learn to the rest of the class using role-play, PowerPoint, or some other interactive/visual medium.

Essay Prompts

1. The message of asking for help is prevalent throughout the novel. Have students write an essay in which they analyze Erica's development over the course of the novel in relation to this theme.
2. There are several motifs that develop throughout the novel: Lisa's nine bikinis, the mood ring, the Chia Pets, Shawntae's dreams, Erica's t-shirts, Roberto's gum. Have students choose one of the motifs to trace throughout the novel then write an essay in which they discuss the importance of the motif and the themes it speaks to in the story.

Important Quotations

For each of the quotations below, have students explain 1) the meaning of the quotation in their own words 2) why the character says this 3) what the quotation says about people or life in general 4) whether they agree or disagree with the idea the quotation presents.

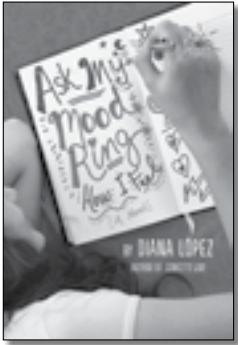
1. Erica (page 94): "But that was Mom, strong and brave. She didn't feel sorry for herself. Or maybe she did. Maybe she kept her true feelings inside, wearing a brave face for the rest of us, because that's how mature people acted. They *handled* things."
2. Erica's mom speaking to Erica's dad (page 257): "Can't you see I'm still alive? Don't make this place like a tomb. I don't need to feel buried already. You understand? Noise is life, that's what I'm saying. Noise is life."
3. Erica (page 308): "And I thought, if I were to draw a line of my life, it wouldn't be straight like the timelines in my history book but tangled like the squiggle Jimmy drew on the sidewalk because you had to change directions sometimes, trail off the path—like the way Carmen did eighth-grade math even though she was supposed to be in elementary school, or the way I took care of mom when she was supposed to take care of me. Maybe there was no

such thing as a normal path. Maybe we all traveled through confused squiggles instead.”

4. Erica’s dad (page 317): “Sometimes I think *promesas* aren’t for the sick person. We do them for ourselves, so we can feel like we’re helping in some way.”

5. Erica (page 321): “I looked at all the faces passing by, and even though they were strangers, I saw traces of my mother, my sister, and my friends because I felt related to everyone. After all, we were like a team, an army, fighting for those we loved.”

about the book



ISBN: 9780316209960

Thirteen-year-old Erica is a plain-Jane girl with no special talents and a Boyfriend Wish List a mile long. She’s not super duper smart, like her younger sister, or always the center of attention, like her greedy little brother, nicknamed Jimmy Gimme. Then, one day, her mother comes home with nine bikinis—one to wear each day before her mastectomy. After the family learns of her cancer, they travel to South Texas to visit the *cuarto de milagros*, a room in a church where people leave treasured items in exchange for God’s help. While there, Erica vows

to convince 500 people to join a fundraiser walk for breast cancer awareness. In the end, she doesn’t know if her mom will fully recover, but as she stands before a cheering crowd of women and survivors at the walk, she knows that when family and friends work together, miracles can happen.

Also by Diana López



Now Available
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ISBN: 9780316029568

Apolonia “Lina” Flores is looking for answers, but she can’t seem to figure out why she’s losing all the important people in her life, even with a house crammed full of books and facts. After her mother’s unexpected death, her father hides from sorrow by keeping his nose buried in books. Her best friend Vanessa’s got problems of her own: her father recently left her mother, who deals with the rejection by obsessively making *cascarones*, which are hollow egg shells filled with confetti. When Vanessa starts to get boy crazy and begins to slip away too, Lina learns to find the answers within herself and understand what it means to grow up.

about the author



Diana López is the author of the novels *Choke* and *Confetti Girl*, which won the 2012 William

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