

Ask My Mood Ring How I Feel, by Diana Lopez
Review by Kimberly Mach

Description from the back of the book:

The only thing I knew for sure was that I had issues. Lots of issues. No wonder my mood ring kept changing! It went from black for tense to pink for uncertain to white for frustrated. I kept waiting to see blue, the color for calmness and peace, but no such luck. With all the craziness in my life, I couldn't see blue if I looked at the sky.

My take:

Ask My Mood Ring How I Feel, by Diana Lopez, is an excellent middle grade novel for a teen book group or for an individual read.

Author Diana Lopez remembers what it's like to be a middle school girl. Rarely have I read a book that made me feel so connected to my eighth grade self. The excitement, the fear, the boys, the uncertainty of everyone's confidence, the loyalty of friends, the changing body, Lopez gets it all. On top of that she shows us that kids deal with real problems, too. Our kids face real problems, like having a parent with cancer.

The book opens with Erica's (Chia's) mom buying bathing suits before their summer vacation. Mom shows Erica and her younger sister, Carmen, nine new bikinis. Then she throws the bottoms away. Soon the girls learn their mother has breast cancer and is due to have a mastectomy. Summer vacation plans have changed.

Before the surgery, the family makes a pilgrimage to La Virgen de San Juan del Valle. Each member of the family leaves a special object as an offering, prays for God and La Virgen to help mom, and then makes a *promesa*. The *promesa* is a thank-you promise to God and La Virgen in acknowledgment of their help and healing.

This is where I fell in love with Erica's character. Erica takes her time deciding what her *promesa*, or promise, will be. While at the shrine she discovers *el cuarto de Milagros*, or the miracle room, "where people share stories and make offerings." It is here where Erica sees a newspaper article and a picture of the Race for the Cure. Erica's *promesa* is to walk the 5k and raise money for breast cancer research.

Erica returns to school in the fall to face many challenges in her eighth grade year. Throughout them her mood ring changes color. Erica relies on the ring to tell her what she is feeling instead of listening to her heart. Her friends, the Robins, remain a constant support throughout the story. Erica deals with boys and homework, then goes home and deals with her mother's illness, all while trying to work on her *promesa*. Erica takes on the role of an adult covering most of the house chores and taking care of her younger brother as her mother recovers from surgery and then faces radiation treatment. Very quickly Erica starts missing assignments and her grades, especially in math, plummet. When a counselor calls a meeting with the family at school, Erica finally shares what she has been struggling with. When at last her teachers and her parents are on the same page, Erica gets the help she needs.

The book concludes with Erica and many of her friends completing her *promesa*. She trusts herself to know and understand her own feelings. She does not rely on her mood ring anymore to tell her how she feels.

Curriculum:

The two most beneficial ways this book could be used are through book talks and book clubs. If a teacher or librarian book talks this book, students will gravitate toward it. Most of the readers will be girls, but I think that's what it's designed to do. Even as an adult reading it I felt the same kinship and recognition I had felt when I read *Are You There God? It's me, Margaret* when I was eleven years old. It's about a girl growing and changing and dealing with the trials of middle school. The only difference is that students will also recognize the struggle of a family dealing with cancer, and we get characters from diverse backgrounds, which all our children need.

The second way I see this book being effective is for a teen girl book club. Again, the driving force for me was the honesty with which Erica (Chia) looked at her friends, her family, and her challenges with school. All girls will recognize this. They will see themselves and their friends in this book.

In a Social Studies and Language Arts classes, teachers can use the book as a launching point for their own students' service projects as well as a geographic study of San Antonio. You may visit the church of La Virgen de San Juan del Valle on line at <http://www.olsjbasilica.org/> There are links to the history of the church, as well as information on pilgrimages and pictures of the basilica – including the mural that Erica describes seeing.

Teachers may even create math problems from the book. How much money did Erica raise? How much do local teams in Race for the Cure raise? Was Erica's achievement similar to this or greater?

An awareness of breast cancer and the organizations that raise money for research may also be used in an extension of science curriculum.

You may visit the author website for Diana Lopez at http://www.dianalopezbooks.com/Home_Page.html She does have teacher resource links for her middle grade novel *Confetti Girl* and her young adult novel *Choke*. (None were listed for *Ask My Mood Ring How I Feel* at the time of this writing.) A talented writer living in Texas, Lopez has two writing awards under her belt. She spent time teaching at the middle school level and currently teaches at the university level. She continues to find stories in the pages of life and we look forward to reading more!