<u>Unlikely Sisters: Anger and Empathy in *Anne of Green Gables* and *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*</u>

Recently, I taught *Anne of Green Gables* alongside Erika Sanchez' *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter.* At first glance, the two seem more like an odd couple than a natural pairing, but the "sisters" of my title is intentional. The closer I read, the more Anne and Julia, both the center points of narratives about absent and constructed families, felt like long-lost siblings, 110 years apart. Both girls are raised in poverty, and both rely on their imaginations, their sharp intelligence, and their love of words to get them through. Both want to be writers, are supported by beloved teachers, and hold onto the hope of higher education as a lifeline. Both question their society's gender norms, and yet both are self-conscious about their bodies, voices, and even their hair. Both are often misunderstood by those around them, and both can be prickly when their insecurities are touched upon.

Yes, in class discussion of *Perfect Mexican Daughter,* my normally vivacious children's literature class went silent. When pressed, they indicated they found Julia emotionally difficult, her anger hard to process. It wasn't that they disliked her or the text, but rather that they had no responses available to account for her anger. Meanwhile, Anne's anger, when noticed at all, was more easily digested. I argue that *Perfect Mexican Daughter* operates through a process of difficult empathy—both empathy that is hard to generate, and empathy for the difficult.

In this paper, I read both Anne and Julia as angry Romantic readers who demand empathetic engagement from the audience, Anne despite her anger, and Julia because of hers. Especially when read together, both books force readers to examine their own expectations of girl readers, female anger, and narrative empathy. In the terms of Rudine Sims Bishop's article, while *Anne of Green Gables* beckons readers to cross the threshold, *Perfect Mexican Daughter* asks readers to push through a doorway that offers substantial resistance. Reading these two constructions of female anger side-by-side urges us, and our students, to question what empathy is, to decode how we offer—or don't—empathy to fictional characters, and to confront our own racial biases about who gets to be angry, and how.