

Declaration of Isabel Quintero-Flores
(Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1746)

I, Isabel Quintero, hereby declare and state as follows:

1. I am over the age of 18 and a resident of San Bernardino County, California. I have personal knowledge of the facts set forth in this declaration and could and would testify competently to those facts if called as a witness.
2. I am a cis-woman, she/her, a daughter of Mexican immigrants. First generation here in the United States and first in my family to finish college. I attended Cal State San Bernardino where I earned a B.A. and an M.A. in English and English Composition, respectively.
3. Since 2013, when I sold my first book, I have published five books: *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*, *Ugly Cat and Pablo*, *Ugly Cat and Pablo and the Missing Brother*, *Photographic: The Life of Graciela Iturbide*, and *My Papi has a Motorcycle*. The books have been translated into multiple languages and *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* was optioned for a television series. In addition, my works have been included in several anthologies alongside celebrated authors, addressing topics ranging from celebrating our bodies in *The (Other) F Word: A Celebration of the Fat and Fierce* to the forthcoming *ABSolutely Normal*, and I currently have five more books under contract—a paranormal trilogy, a young adult novel, and a picture book, all with Kokila, an imprint of Penguin Random House. In addition to books for young people I've published poems and essays.
4. Each of my books has won multiple awards and honors, received stars in industry journals, and has been on several best of lists, such as NYPL, NYT, NPR, Booklist, Publisher's Weekly, and more. The awards include: The Tomas Rivera Award (twice), William Morris Award for Debut Novel, Pura Belpré Honor, The Boston-Globe Horn

Book Award, the California Book Award, The John and Patricia Beatty Award from the California Library Association, the Paterson Prize, and many others. My latest book, *My Papi Has a Motorcycle*, was chosen by Dolly Parton's Imagination Library organization for the last two years.

5. My novel *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*, Cinco Puntos Press (now an imprint of Lee & Low), published in 2014, is about:
 - a. It is her senior year of high school and Gabi Hernandez, a light skinned, Chicana, fat girl, is trying to figure out who she is and what kind of woman she wants to become. Her father is addicted to meth, her mother has strict, but conflicting, expectations of what it means to be a woman, and her friends are going through their own moments of growth and crisis. Gabi finds her voice in the diary she keeps and eventually through the poems she writes.
 - b. The book deals with tough, but real issues such as sex, drug addiction, rape, family rejection, friendship, teen pregnancy, love (familial, platonic, romantic), body issues, and societal expectations. These are all issues that I confronted as a teen, and also that many teens continue to confront.
6. *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* was awarded: The California Book Award Gold Medal, the William C. Morris Award for Debut Young Adult Book, The Tomas Rivera Award, the Paterson Prize, Amelia Bloomer Book List and other prizes. Lists include: Booklist Best Books of the Year 2014, Kirkus Reviews Best Books of the Year 2014, 2015 YALSA Best Fiction for Young Adults, 2015 YALSA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, Top 10 Selection 2015 Américas Award Commended Title, Best Book of the Year School Library Journal, a Junior Library Guild Selection, the NYPL 125 Books We

Love For Teens, among other lists. It is featured on the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center's diverse book initiative, BookDragon, the CTA (California Teacher's Association) chose it for their California Reads List for the 2016/2017 school year, and has been included in state books lists such as the Texas Library Association's Tayshas High School Reading List for the State of Texas, and many other lists. *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* was also given multiple starred reviews in Kirkus, Booklist, and Publisher's Weekly. The book has been featured in many podcasts and on public radio including a feature on NPR. *Gabi* is also taught at high schools and colleges around the world. I think the most important accolades have come from the hundreds of emails, direct messages, letters I've received, and conversations I've had that tell me about the impact my book has had on someone's life. The one that always gets me is when a teen tells me how much the book means to them because they have a parent who suffers from addiction and that they've felt alone too, and that *Gabi* showed them they weren't alone. It never fails that I visit a high school and young women tell me how much their mom is like *Gabi*'s (young and old people of all cultures have told me this) and how they've never seen a character like them in a book until they read my book.

7. *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* is about finding your own way and strength despite cultural, societal, and patriarchal expectations and limitations. It is about saying, "It's okay if I grow differently than my parents, or I want something different. It doesn't make me bad or inadequate, just like being fat doesn't make me bad or inadequate. It's okay to use my voice to advocate for myself and my loved ones, that doesn't make me bad or troublesome. The book is about loving yourself because you are worth loving however you choose to live your life."

8. Growing up I always felt alone. Like Gabi, my dad suffered from addiction when I was her age. I never told anyone because it was something you didn't talk about out loud. The older I got the more I learned how many other people had gone or were going through that same experience, and other experiences that we were taught to feel shame about. Sexuality, our bodies, and for people like Gabi and her friends, their culture were among those things that we were supposed to feel shame about. I remember feeling shame because I thought about sex or wanted to make out with people, and when I talked to female friends about this they also had the same experience. I have also struggled with how I feel about my weight for most of my life but when I learned to love my body at any size I was able to allow new experiences—I just wish it hadn't taken me so long. Lastly, I am also Chicana, like Gabi, and that meant that at school my culture or its significance to American history or literature, was completely omitted. It was as if Mexican people didn't exist. My senior year, our school librarian, Mr. Perez, recommend *Rain of Gold* by Victor Villaseñor, an epic generational story that takes place, partly, in Corona, California, where I am from. It would be the first time I read a book by someone with a similar last name as mine. But it wasn't until college when I read Michele Serros that I realized I could be a writer. That there were people out there like me writing our stories. I often think about how different my life would have been if I had encountered writers like Serros and Villaseñor earlier in my schooling. How much more connected and invested would I have felt in school? How much earlier could I have been working on my craft? So, I wrote *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* in the hopes that the young people who would read it would realize they weren't alone. That the feelings they had were natural, that other

people in the world struggled through being the child of an addict, that yes, loving your body and yourself isn't only for thin or straight sized people, or straight white people.

9. At the beginning, I didn't think *Gabi* would sell beyond my immediate community. Of course, I hoped and dreamed, but didn't think that people would love her like they had. Even then, however, my hope was that whoever read the book, connected with my intention and they wouldn't feel so alone in their experiences. Now that I've seen how much my readers have connected with Gabi and her friends and family, I know that what I've written is more meaningful than I had ever imagined it would be. I feel proud of the book I've written and with every message I receive from readers, I feel prouder.
10. My book is a very appropriate book for students, especially high school students because despite the fact that adults like to reimagine their adolescence as an innocent and uneventful time, many young people's lives are either exactly like Gabi's or similar to her or one of her friends. For example, my teenage years were very much like Gabi's, the book is semi-autobiographical. The fact that many teens live like this in real life, makes it more than appropriate to read in a book. Taking the book away doesn't make their lives disappear, it just reinforces how bent on infantilizing teenagers adults are and how little respect they have for their lived experiences.
11. I think that, like many of the required books in school curriculums, my book is a teaching tool. It is useful in teaching: literary themes and terms, critical thinking, poetry, form, genre, writing from real life, diversity, female protagonist, and even in its use of so-called foul language, teachers can use it to talk about the importance of word choice. There are many lesson plans created by teachers who use my book in their classes across the country, and the opportunities to use the book in the classroom are endless. As for the

literary value of *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces*, I think that's often subjective, as we can see by the lack of diversity in school curriculums, even now in 2022. Obviously, I think that it is part of the larger canon of American young adult, as well as the canon of Chicax young adult literature. My influences for the book range from Michele Serros, Sandra Cisneros, to Sylvia Plath, Shakespeare, and even Jeff Kinney. Like most authors, I take my work seriously and try to be as intentional and honest as I can with my work because I know who my audience is. There are many things at stake for me when I write a book because there are still so few books published by Chicax writers and those of us who do get published have a responsibility to our readers and our communities. Because of that I feel that the literary value of my work is reflected not only in the awards and accolades it has received, but with educators and librarians across the country who continue to use it in their classrooms, part of their whole campus reads programs, in library programming, and in community literary programs.

- 12.** Here are a few emails and messages I have received, and though there are only four here, I have many more that are similar:

April 7, 2021 (email from a high school student)

"Dear Ms. Isabel Quintero,

My name is _____ and I am a student at L_____ high school. I read your novel *Gabi, A Girl In Pieces*, in my honors English class. I was very fond of every chapter in this book immensely. When I read the pages, I felt as if I was alongside *Gabi* living her everyday life. Her life and experiences were authentic and relatable. The writing made me feel as though it was a friend that was telling me about what they're going through.

The part I related to the most was when she was reading the poem about her grandmother. She explains in her poem that she was glad when her grandmother passed away because she wouldn't have the pain anymore of not remembering. I relate to this because in the last months of my grandmother's life she was in a tremendous amount of pain. She was stuck all day long in a hospital bed, she didn't eat much and she didn't smile anymore. Cancer, diabetes, and blood clots were draining her life away. My grandmother was no longer the person I remember from childhood. Just like *Gabi*, I was heartbroken to see her go. On the other hand thankful when she passed away because it meant she would suffer no longer.

Another way I understand and comprehend Gabi is because we have the same relationship with our Hispanic mothers. I believe that every teenage girl has a love-hate relationship with their mom. It was reassuring to know I'm not the only one. Gabi also had a way of explaining feelings that i've had and never been able to explain in words.

I have a few questions. First, where were you when you decided to write this novel ? Second, how do you yourself relate to Gabi ? Third and final question, how did you decide to format the novel in journal entries? This has been the most cherished and personal book I've read so far in my highschool experience.

I would like to invite you to L_____ High School to talk about your novel Gabi, A Girl In Pieces. L_____ high school is a place that teaches over 3,000 students a day. We are a public school that has students of all races and ethnicities. I believe that the topic in the novel is relatable to every single student. Drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, abortion, love, school, morals, and religion are all topics relevant to the students that go to L_____ high school. A POC women author like yourself would be very inspiring to the other POC students and women. Having a successful author come and speak to a public school where there are many low-income students could be a push for students that need it . Your words touched me, and I have faith that your writing will reach the hearts of the L_____ high students.”

December 7, 2021 (email from a high school student)

“Dear Isabel Quintero,

I have recently read your book Gabi, a Girl in Pieces . Your book was very funny! and inspiring to me. It was spectacular and had very good settings, conflicts, and characterization. You gave the characters great characterization that makes me understand them well. I liked how the book had jokes, drama and curses because it made it feel realistic and understandable and it got me interested in it. Something else I liked about the book is that it had spanish words in it and I liked how you included poems and letters in the book which gave a stunning effect to the book. I also LOVED how you included Mexican Spanish words and foods that remind me of my country. It was a book I related to because I'm also a daughter of Mexican immigrants and it was an inspiring book that had a lot of meaning to it. My reasons for my opinions is that the book had so much going on, it talks about how Gabi experiences many different things that she goes through. A character I related to is Gabi because she dealt with drama and in situations she is indecisive and doesn't know what to do or say. Gabi had struggles in high school and I related to her because high school can be difficult. Also, Gabi has friends that surround her and was there for her. I have friends that are supportive and good to be around. My favorite part of the book is the bus scene where Gerorgina and Gabi were calling each other names and that was my favorite part because it was a hilarious part that reminded me of my friends and childhood. Questions I have about this book: Was her parents still harsh to Gabi? Does this book contribute to only mexican people or others? I enjoyed reading your book and I expect to read more of your books! Thank you for your time and I hope you enjoyed my letter.

Sincerely,
G_____ A_____

P.S. can you do a video call?"

February 18, 2021 (from Instagram)

"Hi. You probably get a lot of messages and requests. But my sister and I truly loved your book! It really brought us closer together and gave us the opportunity to talk about so many things. My sister absolutely adores your book. She has read it multiple times and it's her absolute favorite."

June 15, 2019 (Twitter DM)

"I introduced Gabi into my First Year Seminar course at Bridgewater College this past fall. My students LOVED it and connected with it in very powerful ways. A few of them made zines like Gabi's that were amazing. I plan to teach it again this fall. As a final project, my students prepared to be interviewed by the podcast (which my wife co-hosts) Unabridged Pod. You can hear their conversation here: <http://unabridgedpod.com/show-notes/podcast-episode-58-you-have-the-power-a-discussion-with-college-students-about-isabel-quinteros-gabi-a-girl-in-pieces...> I have also gifted copies of it to a handful of students. I have asked my institution to invite you to campus and I hope they do one day soon!"

13. I wrote *Gabi, a Girl in Pieces* because I didn't see many books like that out in the world.

Books about a young Chicana, written by a Chicana, books about a young teen with a parent struggling with addiction. Books about fat girls loving themselves. This book is semi-autobiographical, which means that some of the events or people in the book are based on real things that happened to me or to teens like me. It is an insult to call it vulgar or inappropriate because ultimately it is my life, and the lives of teens like me, that are being called vulgar and inappropriate. We are not born with the privilege of our lives being the accepted status quo and that is why I write—out of respect and to honor our stories, lives, and culture, all of which are constantly under attack.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on February 14, 2022.



[Isabel Quintero]

[Loma Linda, California]