

# Real Women Have Curves Summary & Character Breakdown

*Real Women Have Curves is a two-act play by Mexican-American author Josefina López, who was born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States with her family when she was a young girl. Real Women Have Curves tells the story of a group of first-generation Mexican-American women who work in a dress factory. The story is told from the point of view of Ana, the youngest employee at the factory. Ambitious and bright, Ana yearns to go to college, but does not have the money. The action follows the course of a week at the factory, as the women talk about their lives, loves and deepest desires while attempting to meet impossible production deadlines. Within that week at the factory, the women face many challenges such as the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (called La Migra in Spanish slang), troubles with their husbands and other male characters mentioned in the play, judgement from other characters, as well as yearning for dreams that do not seem possible to fulfill.*

*In the playwright's notes, this story is loosely based and fully inspired by López own story of working in a dress factory and upbringing from childhood in Los Angeles with the constant threat of "la migra" always looming, bringing fear of anyone in an official uniform (police, meter maids, firemen). After the Simpson-Rodino Amnesty Act in 1987, López was able to become a legal resident, went to college, and composed her uplifting story.*

## CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

### Ana (lead)

Ana is a young Mexican American woman who is described as being overweight and pretty. A recent high school graduate, Ana wants to attend college at Columbia University. While waiting for her financial aid to come through, she helps her family by working at her sister's factory in the garment district of Los Angeles. Her job with her sister only earns her \$67 a week, so she looks forward to the chance to leave. She is critical of the job and complains that it is beneath her, explaining in her diary that the hard labor is usually left to undocumented workers with no other choice. She thinks that staying in the factory would be a step back for her, and at eighteen years oldish, she's ready to move on. Ana is described as a feminist who believes her gender should not dictate her future; while the other women worry about Ana finding a husband, she wants to go to college and build her own path.

### Estela

Estela is Ana's sister and the owner of Garcia's Sewing Factory. She is twenty-four years oldish, but years of hard work have aged her. Compared to her younger sister, she is described as being plain. She is constantly worried about paying her workers and keeping up with her bills. Despite working very hard for many years, she is in the process of being sued because she still owes money on her sewing machines and hasn't kept up with the payments. To help clear her debt, she takes on a large order and spends most of the play nervous about completing it. She carries the weight of the women's financial stability on her shoulders and knows that, if they fail to complete the order, they will all lose their jobs. Of all the women working in the factory, Estela is the only one not working in the country legally. She explains that she was once arrested for illegally possessing a lobster. She was charged with stealing the lobster from Santa Monica Beach out of season; she then faced more charges when she failed to appear in court for her case.

Estela has a crush on "El Tormentor," whom the women watch outside of the factory washing his car every day. The women tease Estela for her infatuation with him. Eventually, the two go out on a date, but it does not end well: he tries to take advantage of her and makes inappropriate advances towards her.

## **Carmen**

Carmen is Ana and Estela's mother and the oldest woman in the play at forty-eight years oldish. She is described as short, overweight, and rather conservative. She is critical of her daughters and is especially upset at the prospect of Ana leaving her family and moving to New York. Instead, she thinks Ana should remain in Los Angeles to help her family. Carmen tells many stories, which often entertain the women of the factory while annoying and embarrassing Ana. Carmen takes on the maternal role of the group: she enjoys gossiping and often speaks her mind and doles out advice to the other women. She complains that, at this point in her life, she should be a grandmother at home taking care of her grandchildren—not having to work daily through the pain of her arthritis.

## **Pancha**

Pancha is thirty-two years oldish; she is mellow but quick-witted. The largest of the women in the group, she is comfortable being herself and isn't ashamed of her weight. Pancha suffers abuse from her husband, and because she cannot have children, she feels she has let herself, her family, and her community down. Like Carmen, she has traditional, conservative expectations for the role women should have in society. She does not understand Ana's desire to go away to college, because she thinks that it will prevent Ana from finding a husband in the future.

## **Rosali**

Rosali is twenty-nine years oldish and is often the mediator in the group of women because of her even-keeled nature. She is still a larger woman, but she is the slimmest of the group—and so her perpetual diets, mostly just water and weight loss pills, are often the source of discussion in the factory. Throughout the course of the play, Rosali learns to accept herself and worry less about her weight.