

Who Are You Today, María?

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Abuela¹ knocks on my bedroom door. She has come to my room this morning to watch me choose my outfit for Who You Are Day at school. This is a day when we are allowed to dress in clothes that we think tell the world who we really are. (Within reason, our principal warned—no extremes will be tolerated. I hope that her definition of the word *extreme* is the same as my friend Whoopee's. Nothing that she will put on this morning has ever been seen on this planet, much less at school.)

Abuela makes herself comfortable on my bed as I put on my costume of myself made up of pieces of my life. I thought about my Who You Are Day outfit a lot. Mr. Golden told us in English class to think about our choices: are you going to walk around as a joke or as a poem? I have a suspicion that our teachers have allowed us this chance to dress up as ourselves for a reason. Our school is already a united nations, a carnival, and a parade all at once. There are students from dozens of different countries, and we do not always get along. Most of us are too shy to talk to others outside our little circles, and so misunderstandings come up. The principal has tried almost everything. The Who You Are Day is another of her crazy ideas to get us to communicate. In each of my classes, the teacher said, let us know something about what has made you who you are by what you wear to school tomorrow. It all sounds like a conspiracy to me. But I like dressing up so I do not complain like the boys have been doing. Most of them hate the idea! **M**

Abuela looks at my choices hanging on the door and shakes her head, smiling, like she did when we went to see *Cats*. It is a smile that says, I do not understand, but if it is important to María, I will bear it the best I can. She is elegant even at 7:00 A.M. in her embroidered silk robe and red velvet slippers. She has wrapped a shawl over her shoulders because she is always cold in our cueva,² as she calls the apartment. The shawl was handmade by her mother and it is Abuela's most prized possession. As a little girl, I liked to put it over

1. **Abuela** (ä-bwä'lä) Spanish: grandmother.

2. **cueva** (kwä'vä) Spanish: cave.

Analyze Visuals ▶

Based on the **details** in this painting, what impression do you get of the girl?

She loves and respects her grandmother;
She takes pride in herself

conspiracy
(kən-spīr'ə-sē) *n.* an agreement to perform together an illegal or wrongful act

M CENTRAL CHARACTER

What can you infer about the community in which María lives?

tight knit
close
ethnic

Frida (2004), María Sanchez.
Acrylic on canvas. C. Perez
Collection. © María Sanchez.