“‘I miss them, Mami.’
All those words I had to leave behind. Also, words that in English didn’t carry the same feeling.”

-Julia Alvarez
Two-Minute Spanglish con Mami
BY JULIA ALVAREZ

When we landed in the USA, Mami told me to learn my English.
"Pero, Mami," I whined.
"In English!" she reminded me.
"Okay, Mami," I said smartly.
"Don't be fresh!" she scolded. "My name is not 'Mami'!
It was the same at school. Sister Mary Joseph reprimanded me if she overheard me speaking Spanish to my sisters. "Girls, that's enough," she scolded in a calm voice with a calm face.
She didn't look upset. When Mami was angry, her face was a tangled furrow of lines, her hands flew up, ready to slap.
When I tried speaking English, the school bullies taunted me, "Sipi! Sipi!" I ran home crying to Mami, who knew the most English in our family.
"They are telling you to speak! Speak! Learn to speak in English!"
I mangled the words. I spoke with an accent.
"I asked Mami's help. "How do I say empapitar en inglés?"
Mami said there wasn't really an English word for when I ate too many sweets and got that sick, crying, I'm-going-to-throw-up feeling.
Mami said there was no word, extreme. In English for the first time I wore my new, store-bought party dress.
When my Bronx nails hung around the table after Sunday dinner, telling stories, Mami said there was no sobremesa to describe those hours in English.
"I miss them, Mami. All these words I had to leave behind. Also, words that in English don't carry the same feeling. Like when you banged a finger, instead of crying "Ouch!" you said, "Oh!" Or "That's enough," instead of "Yay!" And how to get along without the attached to the ends of words, making the world safer, more affectionately kid-sized?
"Yay!" Mami said, weary with my complaints. "You miss those words? Bring them into English!"
And I did as she said, at last.

CHIPOTLE.COM/CULTIVATINGTHOUGHT
COMMENTS? QUESTIONS? @CHIPOTLETWEETS

THIS BAG IS MADE WITHOUT BLEACH & FROM 100% POST-CONSUMER RECYCLED PAPER. PLEASE RE-RECYCLE. MADE IN THE USA.