



The House on Mango Street

by Sandra Cisneros

Teacher's Guide

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LIVING
LITERATURE
SERIES

A Perma-Bound Production

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Synopsis

The House on Mango Street

Esperanza Cordero, a seventh-grader, recalls living in upstairs flats on Loomis, Keeler, and Paulina streets before her parents, brothers Kiki and Carlos, and sister Nenny move to an ugly bungalow at 4006 Mango Street. Her dreams eroded by failing plumbing and lack of privacy, she settles for a run-down house with garage, ordinary stairs, sparse yard, and one shared bedroom. World-wise, Esperanza recognizes that Papa's hopes of a better house are baseless.

Hairs

Secure in the familiarity of family, Esperanza describes each member's hair, from broom stiff to curly to silky and concludes that her mother's hair is the most reassuring because it smells like bread.

Boys and Girls

From early childhood, Esperanza knows the female role, which is distinct from cocky, overbearing Latino maleness. Alone and alienated, she tends Nenny and longs for a confidante.

My Name

Esperanza detests her long name, which means "hope." It belonged to her great-grandmother, a wild girl subdued by a macho husband. The name represents the intolerable powerlessness she would replace by renaming herself a defeminized "Zeze the X."

Cathy Queen of Cats

Cathy, who claims kinship with the queen of France, agrees to be Esperanza's friend until next Tuesday, the day her family moves to a better

neighborhood. Esperanza realizes that her family are the people whom Cathy's family disdains.

Our Good Day/Laughter

Esperanza contributes three dollars and two bills purloined from Nenny to purchase Tito's used bike in partnership with Rachel and Lucy. The trio ride happily through the neighborhood. Laughing, Esperanza and Nenny spot a house that "looks like Mexico."

Gil's Furniture Bought & Sold

At a black-owned junk store, Nenny examines a music box. The dealer claims it isn't for sale.

Meme Ortiz

The new resident in Cathy's old house is Meme Ortiz, who breaks both arms while jumping out of a tree while imitating Tarzan.

Louie His cousin & His Other Cousin

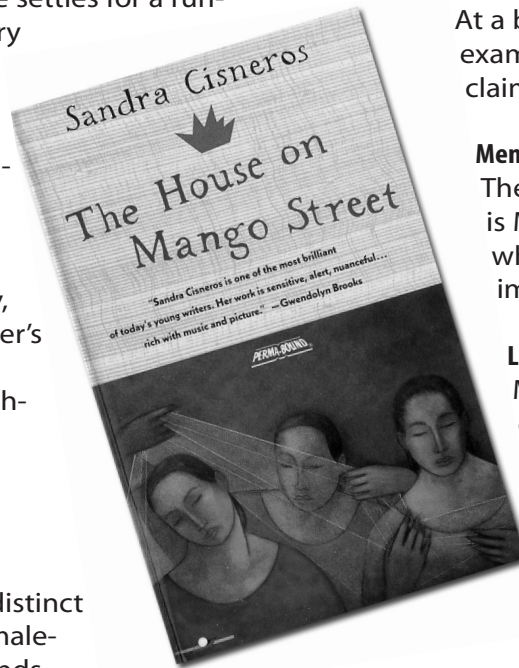
Marin, Louie, Esperanza, and other children halt an alley volleyball game to take a ride in a yellow Cadillac that Louie's cousin is driving. On the seventh tour of the block, police arrest Louie, who damages the car's front end in an escape attempt and is hauled away in handcuffs.

Marin

Marin, the ambitious Avon seller, dates a Puerto Rican. She sits at the window and hopes that a man will rescue her.

Those Who Don't

The confines of Mango Street terrify people of other races, who are unaccustomed to "brown all around." Likewise, Esperanza fears driving through non-Latino neighborhoods.



There Was an Old Woman She Had So Many Children She Didn't Know What to Do

Rose Vargas neglects her fatherless children, who lack respect, even for themselves. No one cares that Angel Vargas dies from a fall.

Alicia Who Sees Mice

After Alicia's mother dies, she must make tortillas each morning for her tyrannic father's lunchbox. She intends to escape him by studying at the university.

Darius & the Clouds

Darius, a rascal who hates school, studies the clouds and finds one shaped like God.

And Some More

The children scan the cloud and exchange insults, mostly about each other's mama.

The Family of Little Feet

With a bag of shoes, Esperanza and Rachel dress up and pretend. They flee after a wino notices Rachel in yellow high heels and calls endearments. Lucy's mother discards the shoes.

A Rice Sandwich

Esperanza wants to carry her lunch and eat in the canteen. For three days, her mother claims to be too busy until Esperanza wears her down. At the canteen, Sister Superior asks her to identify her house. Weeping, Esperanza lies by indicating a rickety flat. The nun allows her to eat at school only once because the flat is near enough for her to walk home.

Chandas

Because Mama neglects to buy shoes with a new outfit, Esperanza must attend a baptismal party in clunky saddle oxfords. Uncle Nacho dances with her to show her off.

Hips

The subject of curved hips raises controversy among Lucy, Rachel, Nenny, and Esperanza. Nenny chants a baby rhyme as the girls skip rope.

The First Job

To earn tuition to a better school, Esperanza takes a tedious job at the Peter Pan Photo Finishers. On break, she feels alone among experienced workers. An Asian man befriends her, then steals a kiss.

Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark

Papa Cordero weeps at the news of his father's death. Esperanza fears that some day her father, too, will die.

Born Bad

Aunt Lupe, a cripple who is going blind, encourages her niece to keep writing so she can free herself. Unaware that Lupe is dying, the children mimic her handicap. Her death causes them guilty dreams.

Elenita, Cards, Palm, Water

Elenita, a fortuneteller, uses a cup of water and Tarot cards to predict that Esperanza will one day be content. Esperanza regrets spending five dollars for the prophecy.

Geraldo No Last Name

Marin is the last to see Geraldo, an illegal immigrant who dances with her and is killed by a hit-and-run driver later that night. Esperanza realizes that Geraldo's relatives in Mexico will never know what happened to him.

Edna's Ruthie

Ruthie, Edna's retarded daughter, lives in a make-believe world and longs to read Esperanza's books.

The Earl of Tennessee

Earl, a jukebox repairman, maintains a basement room while working nights. Esperanza wonders at descriptions of his wife, who is actually a series of women he romances in his room.

Sire

The Corderos encourage Esperanza to ignore Sire, a punk who takes girls like Lois into the alley. Esperanza tries to imagine how such intimacy feels.

Four Skinny Trees

Esperanza takes hope from the persistence of four skinny trees the city planted near her house. If they can survive, so can she.

No Speak English

Rachel ridicules Mamacita for being fat. Mamacita and her son arrive by taxi to join her husband. She languishes because she speaks only Spanish and tries to stop the baby from learning English from television.

Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays

Rafaela’s jealous husband locks her in on Tuesday night while he goes out to play dominoes. She sends a dollar down in a shopping bag on a rope. The children buy her coconut and papaya juice, which she hauls upstairs as a substitute for love.

Sally

Sally’s father believes that she is too pretty for her own good. She feels alienated at school and home and longs for love.

Minerva Writes Poems

Esperanza can’t help Minerva, an abused teen mother of two who writes poems on scrap paper and prolongs the cycle of mistreatment.

Bums in the Attic

Esperanza dreams of a house on a hill with a garden and wants to share her good fortune with bums, who will live in the attic.

Beautiful & Cruel

Esperanza believes she is ugly and plans to emulate beautiful, cruel, red-lipped movie actresses.

A Smart Cookie

Mama Cordero, who is bilingual and sings opera, regrets quitting school because she didn’t have nice clothes.

What Sally Said

Sally makes excuses for her father, who batters her to keep her from running away like his sisters. One day, he loses control and beats her severely with his belt and buckle. Sally misses the next two school days.

The Monkey Garden

As the children explore the weedy garden where the monkey once lived, they find junked cars. Sally refuses to play and allows Tito’s buddies to seduce her. Esperanza tries to rescue her, but Sally refuses. Esperanza lies weeping in the once-friendly garden.

Red Clowns

While waiting for Sally at the tilt-a-whirl, Esperanza complains that her friend does not rescue her from a predator with dirty nails.

Linoleum Roses

To escape home, Sally elopes with a man who keeps as tight a rein on her as her father did.

The Three Sisters

After Lucy and Rachel’s baby sibling dies, three old women predict that Esperanza will keep Mango Street as a part of her identity.

Alicia & I Talking on Edna’s Steps

A year after moving to Mango Street, Esperanza envies Alicia, who plans to return to Guadalajara. Alicia indicates that Esperanza belongs on Mango Street. Esperanza wants someone to improve the neighborhood, but doubts that the mayor will help.

A House of My Own

Esperanza fantasizes about a clean house of her own.

Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes

Compromised by the ghetto, Esperanza tells stories as an escape from Mango Street. She realizes that she will always carry visions of Latinos trapped in poverty.

Timeline of the Action

- Story begins** Esperanza’s family moves from Paulina Street, then from Keeler and Loomis to Mango Street. Esperanza, Lucy, and Rachel buy a bicycle.
- Tuesday** Cathy’s family moves to a better neighborhood. Juan “Meme” Ortiz moves into Cathy’s old house. Meme breaks both arms while playing Tarzan. Louie’s cousin is arrested for wrecking a stolen car. The children dress up in discarded shoes. Esperanza demands a lunch for school.
- Three days later** Her mother packs a rice sandwich. Mama brings home a new outfit for Esperanza to wear to the baptism party. Uncle Nacho asks her to dance.
- Before high school** Esperanza gets a job at the Peter Pan Photo Finishers.
- The next day** She matches photos with negatives. Esperanza’s paternal grandfather dies in Mexico.

Aunt Lupe dies.
Elenita tells Esperanza's fortune
Geraldo is killed by a hit-and-run driver.
Thursday Sally comes for a visit.
Later She misses two days of school after her father beats her.
Esperanza weeps because Sally meets boys in the garden.
Later Sally marries in another state.
August Lucy and Rachel's baby sister gets sick and dies at the end of the week.
end of first year At the end of Esperanza's first year on Mango Street, she refuses to accept her address.

Author Sketch

Merging the skills of poet, essayist, and short fiction writer, Sandra Cisneros has launched a viable career as author and interviewer. The only girl in a family of seven children, she was born in Chicago on December 20, 1954, to an adventuresome, patriarchal, working-class father, who left comfortable circumstances in Mexico City to settle in a Chicago barrio and marry an American Chicana. The family failed to prosper, traveled frequently to visit Sandra's grandmother in Mexico, and moved sporadically until Sandra was 12, when they purchased a small house in a Puerto Rican neighborhood. Her wistful love-hate relation with the Catholic/Hispanic milieu served as the impetus for the semi-autobiographical *The House on Mango Street*.



Timid and introspective from the family's rootlessness and the lack of a stable cadre of friends, Cisneros came to think of herself as an outsider, "a yellow weed among the city's cracks." At her mother's insistence, she became a library borrower before she could read and turned to writing in grade school as a means of escaping barrio squalor. She obtained a B. A. in English from Loyola University, where her reading introduced her to Hispanic literature, especially poets Donald Justice, Mark Strand, and James Wright. The spirit and encouragement of these growth years formed a significant platform on which to build a writing career.

Poetry remained a constant in Cisneros's ambitions. Her gradual realization of ties to Hispanic verse grew from conversations she had with her father, who spoke Spanish to her. A feminist voice evolved as she matured and acquired a belief and trust in her skills, particularly a gift for observation. A graduate of the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, she completed an M.F.A. in creative writing in 1978. The experience disclosed a unique and long suppressed Chicana self that rejected alienation and refused to be quelled by the defenders of Anglo literature. The bold ethnicity of her motifs and rhythms brought invitations to speak, teach, and read Chicano literature in the United States, Mexico, Germany, and Sweden.

From 1978-1980, Cisneros served on the staff of the Latino Youth Alternative High School, but found that classroom work deprived her of the energy to write. A similar experience with public readings caused her to discipline her work and parcel out less time for interviews and appearances. Following the publication of *My Wicked Wicked Ways* and *Bad Boys*, Cisneros achieved full status as a fiction writer from the semi-autobiographical *The House on Mango Street*. The book, a sustained image of self-fulfillment, embodies the author's childhood longing for "a house, a house, a house." Set in an invisible perimeter during the narrator's seventh-grade year, the book depicts tensions, challenges, and male/female relations in a blended Hispanic hodgepodge of Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Chicanos.

Supported by independent funds, Cisneros has remained anchored in her trade in the 1980s and 1990s and has produced two recordings of her poetry. As guest artist, she has worked in Venice, France, and Austin, Texas, and has toured Europe on a National Endowment for the Arts grant. She reports that her writing stems from "those ghosts inside that haunt me, that will not let me sleep, of that which even memory does not like to mention." It is the urgency of these faceless stimuli that impel her Chicana writing. At a lecture for the Second Annual Hispanic Achievement Festival in 1986, Cisneros hoped aloud to ennoble and strengthen the powerless in "the world of thousands of silent women, women like my mama and Emily Dickinson's housekeeper." By choice, Cisneros remains single and lives in San Antonio, Texas.

Critic's Corner

Sandra Cisneros' sense of self borders on the lofty. Of her aim, she boasts, "I feel like a cartographer; I'm determined to fill a literary void." Her immensely sensitive, satisfying coming-of-age vignettes in *The House on Mango Street* have received commensurate appreciation on the multicultural market. Like gritty candid snapshots of barrio life, each entry in this emergent novel/poetry collection contributes to the child's-eye view of happy, sad, celebratory, woe-filled events of everyday underclass life.

Loosely stitched together through sense impression, snatches of dialogue, fleeting events, and masterly poetic devices, Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* refuses to settle into a definition of vignette, image, poem, or story. Taken by parts, it reflects the author's analytic, to-the-bone scrutiny of ghetto life and the perception of being an outsider. Taken as a creative whole, the work portrays the people, events, aspirations, pain, and oddments of life in a Latino neighborhood as evaluated through the eyes of an independent, intensely ambitious Chicana girl. Appropriately, Cisneros dedicates her work to Hispanic women, the victims of traditional patriarchy.

In recognition of her loose style, Cisneros refers to her chapters as "lazy poems." Among the admirers of this evocative style is friend and colleague Gary Soto, who lauds her ambitious prepubescent vision for its imagination and clarity. Less sanguine is the critique of Julian Olivares, which depicts the world of Mango Street as a "dialectic of inside/outside," where women swallow their urge for freedom and choice and reach mechanically for the minutiae of domestication, whether hungry child, wet laundry, broom, or supper to cook.

A contributor to *Nuestro*, *Revista Chicano-Riqueña*, *Contact II*, and *Imagine*, Cisneros has refined her earlier immature persona into a complex individuality. In recognition of her developing expertise, the University of Arizona has awarded her prizes from the Segundo Concurso Nacional del Cuento Chicano. Valued in junior high reading classes and graduate studies of Chicana feminism, the vigorous, winsome, yet telling *House on Mango Street* won the 1984 Before Columbus American Book Award.

Other Works By the Author

- Bad Boys* (1980)
 "Los Tejanos: Testimony to the Silenced" (1984)
 "An Interview with Ana Castillo" (1984)
 "Bread, Dreams, and Poetry: Luis Omar Salinas, the Man" (1984)
The Rodrigo Poems (1985)
 "Salvador Late or Early" (1986)
 "Conversations" (1986)
 "Cactus Flowers: In Search of Tejana Feminist Poetry" (1986)
My Wicked, Wicked Ways (1987)
 "From a Writer's Notebook" (1987)
 "Ghosts and Voices: Writing from Obsession" (1987)
 "Notes to a Younger Writer" (1987)
 "Do You Know Me?: I Wrote *The House on Mango Street*" (1987)
 "Only Daughter" (1990)
Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories (1991)
Loose Woman: Poems (1994)
Hairs-Pelitos (1994)
Caramelo (2002)
Vintage Cisneros (2004)

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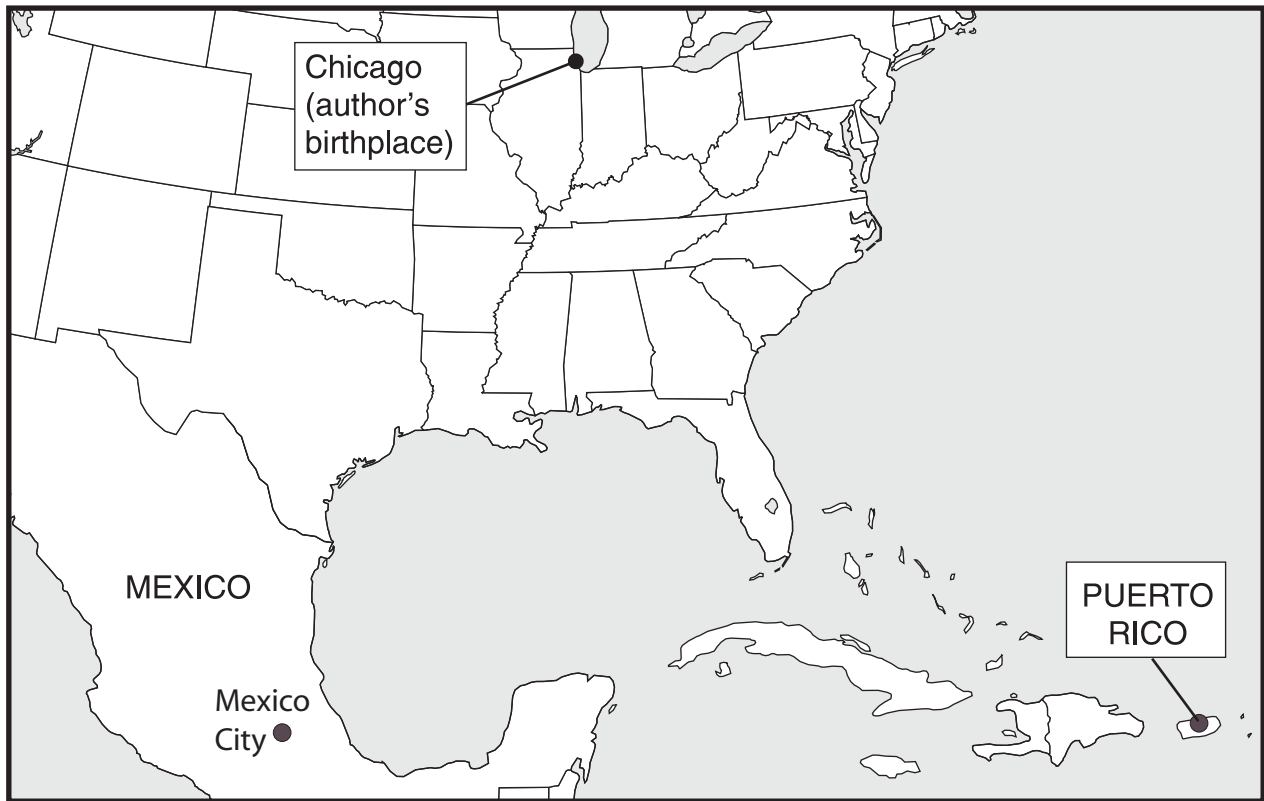
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General Objectives

1. To define biculturalism
2. To describe barrio life
3. To characterize lifestyles of women in a macho culture
4. To outline behaviors and expectations among Latinos
5. To recount themes and events common to childhood
6. To define spousal and child abuse and neglect
7. To cite examples of superstition
8. To characterize the poetic vignette as a vehicle for fiction
9. To account for jealousy, tyranny, and mistrust
10. To discuss how courtship leads to disenfranchisement of women

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the scene in which Esperanza explores the monkey garden
2. To account for Aunt Lupe's encouragement of writing
3. To contrast Rafaela, Minerva, Sally, Mamacita, and Mama as wives
4. To consider the significance of such material goods as the yellow Cadillac, bag of shoes, red lipstick, music box, and bag lunches
5. To explain the controlling image of the mango
6. To study teasing and squabbling as forms of childish conversation
7. To evaluate the effect of the deaths of Angel, Geraldo, and Esperanza's abuelito
8. To point out examples of Esperanza's curiosity
9. To contrast Esperanza's dream house with the reality of the house on Mango Street
10. To explain the prophecy, "You will always be Mango Street"
11. To contrast Cisneros as a feminist with Cisneros as a writer
12. To explain chapter titles, especially "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes"



The Importance of Setting

The milieu of *The House on Mango Street* becomes a focal character, just as the Mississippi River serves *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* like a dominant character. Esperanza, the observer, looks out on street life from the boarded-up windows of her own rickety new home, which sits atop a laundry in so disjointed a fashion that it alarms a visiting nun. Like the wonderland that Alice travels and the yellow brick road of Dorothy's journey through Oz, the street gives back a higgledy-piggledy view of life. Not all aspects are wholesome, as demonstrated by Esperanza's first job working at matching photos and negatives, yet the glimpses of a brief relationship shattered by hit and run, fortune tellers, seedy junk dealers, and Earl's women entering his basement residence do little harm to Esperanza, who has grown world-wise in her twelve years even if she doesn't understand all that happens in the neighborhood.

The true setting for the story displays a jigsaw effect of disconnected family units, each reflecting people trying to live out the mixed expectations of Latino values and multicultural American lifestyles. Binding forces on Mango Street include the school,

church, homes, and uninhabited places. The monkey garden stands apart from Esperanza's milieu as the place where uninhibited passions run amok, terrifying her with their newness and intrigue. Implied earlier in the scene in which Meme breaks both arms in a fall from the tree, the garden typifies the great beyond that beckons to Esperanza, raising her hopes of a house on a hill with a vacant attic she can share with bums.

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Sandra Cisneros's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

Bildungsroman: literally a "formation novel," which describes the coming-of-age of an untried or naive youth. Cisneros's semi-autobiographical memoir recalls a Chicano neighborhood in a large city that accommodates people of numerous cultures. Esperanza's seventh-grade year pairs her with older, younger, and contemporary kids as well as adults whose lives intrigue her. As she determines the aspects of Latina womanhood that suit or dismay, she envisions herself as an adult, sweetheart, wife, and mother. Much of her learning is trial and error, as with the debacle in the monkey

garden and dressing for the baptism party. Her abject sobbing discloses the vulnerable young girl who is still perplexed by sexual behavior and unable to let go of friends like Sally who have crossed over the line between childhood and womanhood.

Symbol: a concrete object that stands for a complex or abstract idea or relationship and implies more than the literal meaning of the word or words, for example, the title image, which names a plump, curvaceous fruit that is as luscious and tempting as ripe womanhood. Peripheral symbols demonstrate Esperanza's toying with the concept of adulthood, particularly the bag of high heel shoes, red-lipped actress, and the outfit her mother purchases for the baptism party. Esperanza's hit or miss approach to womanly attitudes and behaviors indicates that she has not achieved the maturity of the mango, but that the groundwork of maturity is already in place.

Vignette: a brief vivid scene that elucidates a theme, character, or topic in a literary work, such as images of girls yearning for love, newly married women, mothers with children, and women who are disillusioned with marriage. Cisneros chooses to weave her novel from interrelated, but loosely organized scenes from *Mango Street*. The predominant factors of family life, women's social roles, and social and economic status tie together ephemeral scenes such as looking for shapes in clouds, having a fortune told, and observing the arrest of a car thief. Taken as a whole, the string of vignettes becomes a strobe-lit examination of barrio life from the point of view of a wistful girl who hopes for better.

Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about character, growing up, female roles, Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, barrios, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

Acting on Your Values, Rosen Publishing Group
Characters in Crisis, Center for Humanities
Gloria Esteban, Recorded Books
The Hernandez Family, Social Studies School Service
Hispanics of Achievement, Chelsea House
The Mexican Americans, Chelsea House

Mexican Americans, Social Studies School Service
Places and Peoples of the World: Mexico, Chelsea House
Prejudice: Answering Children's Questions, Zenger
Proud to Be Me (video), Zenger
Stand Tall, AGS Media

Also, consult these websites:

Chicano! Homepage

<http://www.pbs.org/chicano/index.html>

Joseph Rodriguez

<http://zonezero.com/exposiciones/fotografos/rodriguez/default>

Related Reading

Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*
Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*
William Armstrong, *Sounder*
Harriett Arnow, *The Dollmaker*
Toni Cade Bambara, "Blues Ain't No Mockin' Bird"
Olive Ann Burns, *Cold Sassy Tree*
Forrest Carter, *The Education of Little Tree*
William Faulkner, "That Evenin' Sun Go Down" and "Two Soldiers"
Ernest Gaines, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* and *A Lesson Before Dying*
Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*
Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and Jim Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*
Carson McCullers, *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and *Member of the Wedding*
N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*
Cynthia Rylant, *Missing May*
Henry Roth, *Call It Sleep*
Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*
John van Druten, *I Remember Mama*
James Vance Walker, *Walkabout*
Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*
Ruth White, *Belle Prater's Boy*
Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* should include these aspects:

Themes

- maturity
- curiosity
- isolation
- discovery
- friendship
- neighborliness
- values
- ridicule
- character
- hope

Motifs

- loss of family members
- learning to compromise
- coping with discontent
- comprehending divisive community conflicts
- defending the vulnerable

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Title and page numbers are given so that you can note the context from which the item is taken.

1. We had to leave the flat on Loomis quick. The water pipes broke and the landlord wouldn't fix them because the house was too old. We had to leave fast. ("The House on Mango Street," p. 4)
(The powerlessness of renters like the Corderos is exacerbated by inhumane landlords who continue to profit from monthly income while putting nothing back into repairs, upgrading, or expansion of aging properties. Most cities require landlords to register property with the tax office or a bureau of rent control. The officials whom the city appoints to supervise rental property tend to have more buildings to inspect than their staff can cover. Consequently, people like the Corderos are reduced to such unsanitary or unsafe practices as carrying water and using rest-rooms in nearby buildings.)
2. It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse—which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female—but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong. ("My Name," p. 10)
(Consisting of a twelve year cycle, the Chinese calendar passes through a set of corresponding animal names, i. e., horse, sheep, monkey, chicken, dog, boar, rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, and snake. Horse years in the twentieth century occurred in 1906, 1918, 1930, 1942, 1954, 1966, 1978 and 1990.)
3. They think suffering is good for you ever since they saw that movie *300 Spartans*. ("A Rice Sandwich," p. 44)
(The 1962 color film about Sparta's unification of Greek states against the invading Persians re-creates one of the famous clashes of the ancient world, the Battle of Thermopylae. Esperanza has little in common with the Spartans, the Mediterranean world's tough-minded militaristic state that removed children from their parents in infancy and reared them in communes to live on sparse, simple food and to keep their bodies strong to protect Sparta from its enemies.)
4. Now Uncle Nacho is coming in his car, and we have to hurry to get to Precious Blood Church quick because that's where the baptism party is, in the basement rented for today for dancing and tamales and everyone's kids running all over the place. ("Chanclas," pp. 46-47)
(Much of the naming in Latino communities comes from the New Testament. Esperanza is named for one of the three virtues, faith, hope, and charity, derived from Chapter 13 of St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. Nenny is a nickname for Magdalena or Mary Magdalene, one of Christ's followers. The church where the baptism party is held commemorates Christ's blood at the cruel torture of crucifixion. Because the scene is one of the holiest in the New Testament, the blood becomes a sacramental element of communion, which depicts wafers and wine as the body and blood of Christ. The blood is called precious because of the great cost to the sufferer who was martyred at Golgotha.)
5. The waitress with the big fat hips who pays the rent with taxi tips ... says nobody in town will kiss her on the lips ... ("Hips," p. 51)
(Jump rope rhymes, which are universal sing-song lyrics set in a short-long or iambic pattern, incorporate nonsense phrases along with gossip, history, religion, and everyday knowledge. The

children seem unaware that a taxi dancer is a woman who is employed at a dance hall to take tickets from each male who buys them and to dance once per token as a part of the price of admission. In the era of pay-per-dance, taxi dancers had a low reputation, tantamount to that of prostitutes.)

6. When the two arcs open wide like jaws Nenny jumps in across from me, the rope tick-ticking, the little gold earrings our mama gave her for her First Holy Communion bouncing. ("Hips," pp. 51-52)
(The traditions of religion color the lives of the people on Mango Street, who seem universally Catholic. The wearing of gold earrings at a first communion acknowledges a child's admission to full membership in a Catholic church. For a girl, the time marks a passage toward womanhood.)
7. I thought I would because he was so old and just as I was about to put my lips on his cheek, he grabs my face with both hands and kisses me hard on the mouth and doesn't let go. ("The First Job," p. 55)
(Esperanza seems ill-equipped to identify sexual harassment or to know what to do to protect herself from a mature man who pretends to honor her birthday, then forces her into a degrading personal embrace that puts his mouth against hers.)
8. Most likely I will go to hell and most likely I deserve to be there. My mother says I was born on an evil day and prays for me. ("Born Bad," p. 58)
(The syncretism of religion and superstition causes Mrs. Cordero to cling to an ignorant belief that people can be cursed by a natal horoscope, which plots the configuration of planets on the day of their birth. Although she has been brought up in a Catholic community, she ignores the concepts of free will, grace, and salvation while maintaining superstitious nonsense about a soul doomed by bad luck.)
9. I took my library books to her house. I read her stories. I like the book *The Waterbabies*. ("Born Bad," p. 60)
(In 1863, Charles Kingsley wrote a moral fantasy about a chimney sweep who falls into a river and goes to live with an underwater colony of children. The story deals euphemistically with the terrible social conditions in England that forced poor parents to rent out their slenderest children to climb down chimneys and loosen soot. The children earned a pittance for dangerous climbing and suffered miserable lung damage that often killed them from pneumonia or brown lung.)

10. Just another brazer who didn't speak English. Just another wet-back. ("Geraldo No Last Name," p. 66)
(The unfortunate man who dances with Marin is a nameless restaurant worker known only as Geraldo, an illegal who comes to the United States by crossing the Rio Grande River, usually at night, to evade Immigration and Naturalization authorities. Such workers migrate to farms, factories, or businesses that offer manual labor at a lower price than minimum wage.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. Discuss the house on Mango Street.
(Moved from Paulina to Keeler to Loomis to Mango Street, the Cordero family, composed of the Cordero parents, brothers Kiki and Carlos, Esperanza, and her little sister Nenny, leave hurriedly to escape burst pipes at their last rented residence, which was a second-floor flat with boarded-up windows above a failed laundromat. They buy a rundown residence on Mango Street in a barrio among other Hispanics from Mexico and Puerto Rico. The good points of the house are its privacy, single-family ownership, and no complaining landlord to pound the ceiling with a broom and demand quiet.

Although Papa Cordero has not found the dream home—a white house with ideal yard, trees, grass, indoor stairs, and basement—he has located something to purchase. The Corderos bide their time until better opportunities come along. Esperanza, who is critical of the property and doubtful of her father's big plans, hates the crumbling bricks, tight steps, and swollen front door that is hard to push. The front has no yard and only four small elms on the curb. There is a garage and indoors stairs, but only one bathroom and one bedroom which have to be shared by the large family.)

2. Who are Esperanza's friends?
(On Mango Street, Esperanza knows Cathy, a snobbish neighbor who claims to be a relative of the queen of France and intends to move away on Tuesday to a better neighborhood. Against Cathy's advice, Esperanza makes friends with Tito, Lucy, and Rachel, who smell like brooms, and shares the purchase of a bike and jump rope games. After Cathy moves on Tuesday, Esperanza meets Juan "Meme" Ortiz and joins in the First Annual Tarzan Jumping Contest. Downstairs from Meme is Marin, a lonely

Puerto Rican cousin who lives with Louie and his cousin. Significant to the novel are Rosa Vargas' fatherless children, who are so neglected that Angel leaps from Mr. Benny's roof and is virtually unmourned. Alicia, who gives Esperanza a leather purse, is the only female in her house, and therefore has to get up early to make tortillas for her father's lunchbox. Darius is a rowdy, unschooled boy who sees God in the clouds. Next door is Ruthie, Edna's daughter, who was once married and returned alone to live with her mother. Slightly older is Minerva, a married woman with two kids who writes poems on scraps of paper.

Less pleasant are Sire and his punk friends, who carouse late at night with Lois, and Sally, a fast girl who flirts with her dark hair and flashing eyes and dismays Esperanza by going into the dark garden with lustful boys to be kissed and fondled. After marriage, Sally, like Mamacita and Rafaela, loses her freedom to meet with friends and be happy.)

3. How does Esperanza get involved with a stolen car?

(While visiting Marin, Esperanza meets another of Louie's cousins, a boy who drives a yellow Cadillac into the area while the younger children play volleyball. When the cousin honks the horn to draw attention from people on Mango Street, the children climb onto the soft seats and push the buttons of the electric windows and the FM radio while Louie's cousin drives around the block and down the alley six times. The scene shifts rapidly on the seventh tour of the block as sirens end the idyll. The children get out in the alley so Louie's cousin can race away from the police. The chase ends in a quick left turn into a lamp-post, which squashes the front end of the flashy car into a bent-up alligator. Esperanza and the others are mere onlookers as the police handcuff the battered, bleeding cousin and drive him away.)

4. What is Marin's place in her American home?

(A visiting cousin from Puerto Rico, Marin stays indoors taking care of Louie's sister, singing a two-line ditty, and snapping her fingers as she looks into the street. In private, she confides to Esperanza that she sells Avon and babysits. With the money she earns, Marin plans to return to Puerto Rico to marry her boyfriend, but her fantasies suggest that her plans are nebulous. A dreamer, she envisions dressing well for a downtown job and meeting an ardent suitor on the subway who will whisk her away from the daily doldrums. After her aunt relieves her from babysitting, Marin smokes, listens to the radio, and dances alone under the streetlight.

Esperanza returns to the winsome, dreamy-eyed Marin in "Geraldo No Last Name" with the sad meeting of Marin and an illegal alien who works in a restaurant and speaks no English. While attending a dance, at 3 A. M., she was the last to see

Geraldo alive. He left, was hit by a car, and died in a hospital emergency room where only an intern treated him. Marin submits to interview three times, once by the hospital staff and twice by the police, but she fails to remember the restaurant where Geraldo worked and can supply no other details.)

5. What type of home does Esperanza dream of?

(Disappointed in the Mango Street property, Esperanza dreams of the ideal home on a hill with gardens like the ones her father tills. Ashamed of her poverty, she stops visiting her father's place of employment on Sundays because it is a level to which her family can never attain. Determined to make her own luck and not depend on such frippery as the lottery, she dreams of living in comfort and of being able to offer hospitality to bums, who will live in her attic.

In the last vignettes, Esperanza perpetuates her dream of ownership and of a house with a porch, pillow, and purple petunias. Living alone, she will own books and keep shoes by the bed. Her stories grow more pointed as she focuses on the ache inside that makes her fantasize about a writing career that will take her to an ideal home and allow her to return for the people still trapped in the barrio.)

Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. What does Esperanza learn in the monkey garden?

(At a place where a foreign family used to live with their pet monkey, Esperanza and her friends roam freely because the family has moved to Kentucky. The flora are showy sunflowers, hollyhocks, and cockscombs, roses and pears, and weeds flourishing among the green apple trees. As the garden grows wild, people use the site as a dumping ground for junk cars, which the foliage covers "as if with its old-man memory." In a play world far from their mother's voices, Esperanza joins Nenny and Eddie Vargas and makes a clubhouse in the blue pickup.

Esperanza's delight in the playground comes to an end one day when she and Sally get into an argument with Tito and his friends, who take Sally's keys. Esperanza is aware that "Sally had her own game." The boys insist on kisses before returning the keys; Sally follows them into the dark. Esperanza misunderstands the situation and runs for help from Tito's mother, but is unable to penetrate the mother's apathy. Esperanza arms herself with a brick, then is nonplused by Sally's refusal to be saved.

The inexplicable behaviors of more mature kids stymy Esperanza, who takes shelter at the other end of the garden and weeps exhaustedly under a tree. Driven to thoughts of suicide, she wishes herself dead, then withdraws from the playground which she had once enjoyed as a respite from the gritty bore-

dom of Mango Street. Later, a mirror event at the tilt-a-whirl suggests the topsy-turvy state of emotions that pits Esperanza against Sally in the late-childhood fight to save innocence. To Sally's lame excuses of giving in to skirt chasers, Esperanza is indignant and angry to the point of despair.)

7. How does Sally's life parallel those of other Latina women?

(After eloping to another state with a marshmallow salesman, Sally is momentarily happy so long as she pleases her tyrannical husband. His behavior, more like that of a stern father than of an equal, imprisons her in a flat where she is bored by her belongings and longs for her old romps with friends. Like Ruthie sleeping on the sofa at Edna's house and Rafaela dangling a shopping bag for the children to fill with sweet drinks, Sally loses her girlhood autonomy and lives in indoor lockup as a married woman. Less desperate than Mamacita, who doesn't even speak English, or of Mrs. Cordero, who sings and sews away her boredom and frustration in Madame Butterfly's arias and silk-threaded tulips, Sally has moved rapidly through states of maturity to the stultifying matronhood that accompanies marriage.)

8. What events denote danger on Mango Street?

(Esperanza's brief glimpses of danger delineate the precipitance of crisis and its resultant losses. Louie's cousin travels barely the length of the alley before banging up the car and his body in a one-car smash-up at the lamppost. Angel Vargas drifts down from Mr. Benny's roof to the ground without making a sound. Lucy and Rachel's baby sister dies in less than a week from a fever. Esperanza explains, "Then Jesus came and took the baby with him far away." In a like manner, Grandfather Cordero dies, taking Mr. Cordero on an unexpected trip to Mexico, and Geraldo, Marin's fleeting acquaintance, is killed in a bloody hit-and-run accident.

Another type of menace lurks at the edge of Esperanza's innocence. She turns from Sire and the dirty boys who form his gang and frolic the late-night streets with Lois. Esperanza's view of Sally's friendship with Tito and his pals is equally limited in details, but heavy on sexual innuendo. At the tilt-a-whirl, Esperanza is outraged at the rough behavior of boys who chase Sally and who press Esperanza's mouth with sour kisses and her cheek with dirty hands even though she tries to squirm away from their grasp. In anger at the trickery of romantic illusion, Esperanza accuses, "Sally, you lied, you lied. He wouldn't let me go. He said I love you, I love you, Spanish girl.")

Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. What is the author's intention in writing about Mango Street?

(Cisneros paints a checkered picture of life in a barrio in sub-

standard housing among people of Hispanic background, both Mexican and Puerto Rican. The delights of childhood are the universal joy in bike rides, dressing up in high heels, and forming clubs and jumping rope with friends while sharing the standard curiosity about sex and married life that children encounter in the junior high years. As Esperanza grows beyond seventh grade, her longings differ from those of Lois, Sally, Marin, and Rafaela. Beyond the wish for a female body dressed in high heels and red lipstick, Esperanza wants security and a home purchased through her own efforts and not by a male rescuer. Her ideal residence is a place where she can live alone and be herself, where she can look out from a high hill at the sky rather than down into a ghetto.)

10. Why is writing crucial to Esperanza's dream?

(Early on, Esperanza learns from Aunt Lupe the importance of writing. The evanescence of her aunt's vigor is beyond childish understanding, but after Aunt Lupe's death, Esperanza remembers the disease that locked her aunt in a second-floor rear apartment under a constantly lit yellow light bulb. She recalls the haphazard fate that reduced her aunt's limbs to limp bones and stole her vision. The cruel game that involved Esperanza, Lucy, and Rachel in mimicry returns to haunt Esperanza, who retreats into the lame excuse, "We didn't know."

When it is too late to treasure Lupe, Esperanza recalls that it was her aunt who had listened to her poems, who had pressed her to keep writing. When death returns Esperanza to superstition and thoughts of the future, she ponders the fortune-telling of the three sisters. Esperanza puzzles over the one with marble hands who predicts a circle, a return to Mango Street. Misperceiving the meaning of prophecy, Esperanza fails to connect the return to the street with an exercise in writing. She doesn't perceive of mentally returning to her bank of memories to re-create them in written form. In adulthood, the writer Cisneros speaks through Esperanza, child of hope. In reference to the friends and kin on Mango Street, the Esperanza voice declares, "They will not know I have gone away to come back.")

Questions 11-12 Creative Level

11. Explain in a short speech why Esperanza dreams of a house on a hill and why she wants to share it with bums.
12. Give a speech about the role of the Latina woman in determining values, manners, superstitions, and public deportment. Use as examples: Sally, Tito's mother, Mrs. Vargas, Mrs. Cordero, Marin, Sister Superior, Cathy, Ruthie, Nenny, Alicia, Aunt Lupe, and other female characters from the novel.

Across the Curriculum

Journalism

1. List questions an interviewer might pose to the residents of Mango Street while composing a feature on barrio life. Consider these: What changes would you make in transportation and education? How would you describe the incidence and causes of crime, such as car theft? How would you improve your children's lives? How can the city be more responsive to your needs? Whom do you support for mayor? What agencies might help women who are battered, disenfranchised, or discontent?

Cinema and Drama

1. View several realistic films and television series on longing, for example, *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Eve's Bayou*, *The Joy Luck Club*, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, *Rambling Rose*, *Member of the Wedding*, *Daughters of the Dust*, *The Color Purple*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Souder*, *Places in the Heart*, and *The Milagro Beanfield War*. Discuss with a small group the lasting effects of poverty and neglect.
2. Write several conversations that are only implied, such as Esperanza applying for a job at the Peter Pan Photo Finishers.

Science and Health

1. Compose a chalkboard lecture on the causes of emotional distress. List examples from Esperanza's coming of age. Comment on worthy and ignoble aspects of her character, such as boasting and lying, and on the influence of older women. Express the influence of Sally's promiscuity.
2. Describe aloud the change that takes place in Esperanza as she matures. Note how she takes risks, dreams, questions authority, and evaluates experiences. Predict how her adulthood will differ from that of Great-Grandmother Esperanza.

Geography

1. Compose a first person account of life in a ghetto. Explain why "brown all around" comforts Esperanza and why she feels out of place in other ethnic neighborhoods. Suggest

ways Esperanza can stop thinking of herself as a Chicana and start emphasizing her American background, for example, by reading books by a variety of authors, joining Girl Scouts, attending church or working in another neighborhood, or developing friendships with penpals of other races.

Art

1. Design an advertisement for the Peter Pan Photo Finishers, mystic symbol on Elenita's wall, list of rules for dominoes, movie poster of a red-lipped actress, schematic drawing of the monkey garden, services offered by a shelter for battered women, first aid for a broken arm, list of laws concerning the eligibility of minors for a marriage license, business card for Gil, headstone for Aunt Lupe or Angel Vargas, welcome sign for Mango Street, taxi schedule and fees per fare, placard naming Sister Superior's office hours, chart comparing the Hispanic population of the United States to other racial groups, bill of sale for the house on Mango Street, or newspaper headline on the phenomenon of illegal immigration.
2. Draw a story board for a movie version of *The House on Mango Street*. List crucial props.
3. Create a character web representing the interconnectedness of residents and non-Hispanic outsiders on Mango Street. Include Sister Superior, the police, Gil, owners of the monkey, queen of France, Bugs Bunny, Tarzan, Wonder Woman, Peter Pan, Marilyn Monroe, Marlon Brando, Peter Pan, Rapunzel, the Beatles, Joan Crawford, the Virgin, and the Oriental man who kisses Esperanza.

Music

1. Listen to recordings of Hispanic music in a variety of moods, for example, the singing of Jose Feliciano or Gloria Esteban. Locate tunes that fit different chapters from the book, for example, dance music to fit "Chanclas," contemplative music for "Four Skinny Trees" and "Hairs," and nostalgic music for "Linoleum Roses."
2. Study the story of *Madame Butterfly*. In what way does she seem suited to barrio life? Why

is Mama Cordero drawn to the opera's arias? Listen to "Un Bel Di." Explain why it is a poignant and significant operatic work for female voice.

Economics

1. Describe in a short speech the effect of money, education, prestige, and power on barrio dreams. Explain why a rise in status, such as ownership of a Cadillac or living in a house on a hill, would end some of the misery, boredom, and hopelessness on Mango Street.

Social Studies and Current Events

1. Lead a debate about whether Rose Vargas' children should be placed in a foster home or halfway house or put up for adoption. List reasons why she is failing her responsibilities to the children, especially Angel. Discuss whether ignorance or poverty justifies child neglect.
2. Amplify the background elements of the story, particularly illegal aliens, ethnic communities, age limitations on marriage, child abuse and neglect, Catholicism, parochial schools, car theft, bilingualism, underclass behaviors and needs, derelicts, hit and run, and spouse battering.
3. Discuss your response toward the men of Mango Street. Why does Cisneros name mostly wives and daughters? Why are wives and daughters expected to stay home? Why are Hispanic men overly jealous? How do wives overcome prejudice, brutality, disrespect, and the tension of anger and spite? How do other races differ in male expectations of female family members? Why does the Oriental man take advantage of Esperanza by kissing her against her will? Why does Sandra Cisneros dedicate the book to women?
4. Explain briefly how research on folk cultures is conducted. Why would a sociologist study Hispanic housing, cars, sex roles, music, education, religion, cooking, family relationships, clothing, entertainment, pets, holidays, school, and lore in order to gain a fuller impression of the Hispanic mindset?

5. Make a time line indicating names and accomplishments of significant Hispanics, for example, Henry Cisneros, Cesar Chavez, Fernando Lamas, Martin Sheen, Emilio Estevez, Gary Soto, Rudolfo Anaya, Desi Arnez, Xavier Cugat, Gloria Esteban, and Rita Moreno. Explain why New York, Arizona, California, Texas, New Mexico, and Florida receive most of the contributions from America's Latinos.

Psychology

1. Compose chalkboard definitions of fantasy, ego ideal, creativity, and adolescence.
2. Explain to a small group what survival techniques give poor girls and women the strength to face substandard living conditions, loss, delinquency, gossip, death of a child, abuse, hopelessness, disease, loneliness, patriarchy, and disappointment. Discuss how some characters keep their dreams alive, particularly Esperanza, Cathy, Marin, Darius, Mama, Mamacita, and Alicia.
3. Make an oral report on the importance of optimism. Discuss ways in which barrio dwellers compensate for poverty with gaiety, friendship, family, religion, education, art, music, dancing, stories, plants, animals, food, work, comfort, loyalty, television, and moral support.
4. Organize a discussion of dreams. Why does Esperanza long for a house on a hill? What needs in her life are not being met by the house on Mango Street? Do her dreams of a better home give her hope? Why would she feel more secure on a hill?

Mathematics and Computers

1. Using desktop publishing, create a family tree including current and past members of the Cordero family.
2. Create a bulletin board illustrating current census figures concerning the racial makeup of the United States. Highlight a map with graphs and data indicating what parts of the nation are the most racially diverse. Note the percentage of nonwhite peoples in Florida, the Southwest, and large cities like New York, Seattle, San Diego, Los Angeles, El Paso, San

Antonio, and Chicago. Contrast life span, incidence of disease, educational aspirations, and quality of life for Hispanics.

Language and Speech

1. Compose individual posters translating and explaining these Spanish terms: *las mujeres, brazer, cuándo, chanclas, frijoles, meringue, tembleque, las comadres, Está muerto, los espíritus*. Add these English terms: ethnicity, Chicana, Chicano, Latino, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Mexican-American.
2. Compose a short speech in which you explain Esperanza's dislike of her name, which has too many letters. What is the English translation of her name? Summarize how a fantasy name like Zeze the X and experiences on Mango Street give Esperanza hope.
3. Write a theme in which you explain why some objects, people, and events have value and meaning for Esperanza, particularly hair, papaya juice, red-lipped movie actresses, tilt-a-whirl, tortillas, shoes, dancing, yellow Cadillac, bike, monkey garden, home on a hill, friends, Aunt Lupe, baptism party, eating a bag lunch in the canteen, skipping rope, caring for Nenny, and composing poetry.
4. Read aloud images from the novel that appeal to the five senses, such as "Tables with their feet upside-down and rows and rows of refrigerators with round corners and couches that spin dust in the air when you punch them and a hundred T.V.'s that don't work probably," "On the corner there is music from the bar, and Rafaela wishes she could go there and dance before she gets old," "Then she takes my hand and looks into my palm. Closes it. Closes her eyes too," and "There were dizzy bees and bow-tied fruit flies turning somersaults and humming in the air."

Literature

1. Note how a minor character elucidates the themes of coping with poverty, freedom, aspirations, and fulfillment. Mention Earl, Tito, Darius, Marin, Geraldo, Lucy, Rachel, Great-Grandmother Esperanza, Rafaela, Angel, Rose Vargas, Uncle Nacho, Louie, Gil, Nenny, Kiki, Carlos, Cathy, Aunt Lupe, Elenita, Sally, Minerva, Mamacita, Alicia, Edna, and Sister Superior.

2. Compose a short segment of dialogue in which you become a peripheral character in the novel. Consider taking the role of furniture store clerk, parochial school teacher, police officer, mover, rent collector, nun, or tilt-a-whirl operator.
3. Memorize and recite Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus." Explain its ramifications for Latino immigrants.
4. Write an extended discussion of the title. Explain the image of the mango in conveying the idea of full, ripe womanhood. Apply the following terms to its purpose as a unifying metaphor: ripeness, taste, fragrance, shape, color, and source. In what ways is Esperanza like a mango? Do these qualities ennoble, uplift, or encourage her?

Education

1. Brainstorm ways that classroom teachers can assist students from the barrio or ethnically mixed neighborhoods in coping with personal and family trauma, particularly through keeping a journal, reading young adult fiction, discussing personal topics aloud, and writing first-person poetry.

Student Involvement Activities

1. Organize a panel discussion of bias. Discuss how the novel presents Esperanza's muddled thinking and what she has to learn about coping with people from different backgrounds and social levels.
2. Launch a discussion group of advice to a parent on dealing with a rude, disobedient, or impertinent child like Esperanza or her friends. Suggest timely punishments for lying, mocking, or endangering others.
3. List questions to ask at a meeting with the mayor and the media concerning the needs of Mango Street. Mention the need for medical and emergency services, police protection, city beautification, and parks and playgrounds.

4. Compose a web site naming uplifting literature about families, such as Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, Kaye Gibbons's *Ellen Foster*, Michael Dorris's *Yellow Raft on Blue Water*, or Cynthia Rylant's *Missing May*. Mount scenes that express positive family situations, for example, shared meals, church and school attendance, learning to ride a bike, baptism parties, shopping in a junk store, and dressing up in high heels.
5. Explain with a collage or mobile how events in Esperanza's seventh-grade year affect the whole neighborhood. Depict sudden deaths, arrivals and departures, police investigations, new jobs, marriages, and pastimes.
6. Dramatize a meeting between Esperanza, Mama Cordero, and Sister Superior. Explain why Esperanza must eat lunch at home. Comment on occasions when she lies rather than tell a painful truth.
7. Contrast the types of love offered by male characters, particularly Uncle Nacho, Mamacita's husband, Tito and his buddies, Sally's husband, Rafaela's husband, Minerva's husband, Earl, and Papa Cordero. Contrast the support of Sister Superior, Marin, Rose Vargas, Rachel and Lucy, and Mama Cordero.
8. Role-play the part of Sister Superior in dissuading children from dangerous behaviors, bolstering their self-esteem, building pride in Hispanic background and history, aiding "bum men," encouraging nutrition, and identifying healthy relationships between boys and girls. Join a group in pantomiming scenes in which female characters perform such common labors as tortilla making, ironing, child care, and cleaning house.
9. Discuss the effects of gossip, ridicule, spying, drunkenness, theft, and family abuse on the neighborhood. Summarize Esperanza's reaction to the worst in adult behavior.
10. Draw a cause-and-effect diagram illustrating the changes that take place in Esperanza as she copes with poverty.

Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of fairness, honor, humiliation, learning, loyalty, loss, and foolishness among Esperanza's friends.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate how poverty humbles people.
3. Compose a scene in which Esperanza buys a music box or high heels.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including Sally's flirtatiousness, Cathy's snobbery, Angel's foolishness, Elenita's superstition, Sire's menace, Nenny's simplicity, Esperanza's discontent, Marin's fantasy, Mamacito's despair, and Louie's cousin's daring.
5. Account for the importance of children's games and beliefs.

Vocabulary

In the lines below, underline words to complete the thought.

1. She teaches us to cross and uncross our legs, and to run like a (**babushka, double-dutch, currency, lottery**) rope, and how to walk down to the corner so that the shoes talk back to you with every step. Lucy, Rachel, me (**syllables, marimbas, tee-tottering, flopping**) like so.
2. Nobody but an (**brazier, las comadres, intern, wetback**) working all alone. And maybe if the surgeon would've come, maybe if he hadn't lost so much blood, if the surgeon had only come, they would know who to (**notify, descend, baptize, patrol**) and where.
3. That up there, that's (**dominoes, las mujeres, Rapunzel, cumulus**), and everybody looks up. And don't forget (**naphtha, nimbus, P. R., braille**) the rain cloud, I add, that's something.
4. I'm no (**cumbias, Spartan, Chanclas, wetback**) and hold a/an (**muerto, éspiritus, anemic, punk**) wrist to prove it. I can't even blow up a balloon without getting dizzy.
5. The top of the refrigerator busy with holy candles, some lit, some not, red and green and blue, a plaster saint and a dusty (**luxury, Palm Sunday, hoochi-coochi, whitewall**) cross, and picture of the (**voodoo, evil eye, salas, Guadalajara**) hand taped to the wall.
6. Out stepped a tiny pink shoe, a foot soft as a rabbit's ear, then the thick ankle, a (**flutter, ball and chain, rancheras, walrus**) of hips, (**punk, Avon, A-framed, fuchsia**) roses and green perfume.
7. The boys at school think she's beautiful because her hair is shiny black like (**cuándo, raven, suede, canteen**) feathers and when she laughs, she flicks her hair back like a (**meringue, tembleque, satin, wobbly**) shawl over her shoulders and laughs.
8. She borrows (**frijole, cockscomb, thistle, opera**) records from the public library and sings with (**velvety, porcelain, squinty, black-tarred**) lungs powerful as morning glories.
9. There beneath the roots of (**linoleum, soggy, cat-eyed, blue-veined**) flowers were the bones of murdered pirates and dinosaurs, the eye of a (**Tahiti, unicorn, papaya, 45**) turned to coal.
10. We rode up the (**barrettes, alley, flooring, canteen**) and around the block six times, but Louie's cousin said he was going to make us walk home if we didn't stop playing with the windows or touching the (**wobbly, FM, swan-neck, lopsided**) radio.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Identification (30 points)

Identify the character described below. Choose from the list below. You may use answers more than once.

abuelito	Esperanza	Mamacita	Mr. Cordero	Sally
Alicia	Geraldo	Marin	Rachel	Sire
Angel	Kiki	Meme Ortiz	Rafaela	Sister Superior
Darius	Lucy	Minerva	Rosa Vargas	three sisters
Ruthie				

- _____ 1. tall skinny lady with red lipstick and blue babushka, one blue sock and one green because she forgot
- _____ 2. just another *brazier* who didn't speak English
- _____ 3. her kids are too many and too much; she is their mother and only one against so many
- _____ 4. plays records on Sunday mornings that sound like sobbing
- _____ 5. would like to be self-baptized as Lisandra, Marita, or Zeze the X
- _____ 6. has eyes like Egypt and nylons the color of smoke
- _____ 7. has two kids and a husband who left; cries because her luck is unlucky
- _____ 8. smelled like cinnamon
- _____ 9. makes the children promise not to tell anybody she is getting married when she goes back to Puerto Rico.
- _____ 10. doesn't like school and acts stupid and foolish
- _____ 11. drinks coconut and papaya juice on Tuesdays
- _____ 12. pitches pennies with friends and laughs late
- _____ 13. has hair like fur
- _____ 14. fears driving in neighborhoods of another color
- _____ 15. makes Esperanza point to her house

Part II: Completion (20 points)

Fill in each blank with a word from the list that follows.

bones	English	keys	negatives	skates
broom	gold earrings	lamppost	pickup	Tarzan
Cadillac	high heels	monkey	prints	tears
canteen	iron	moths	rice sandwich	tree

- 1. It's like all of a sudden he let go a million _____ all over the dusty furniture and swan-neck shadows and in our _____.
- 2. This is the _____ we chose for the First Annual _____ Jumping Contest.
- 3. At the Peter Pan Photo Finishers, I was supposed to match _____ with their _____.
- 4. No speak _____, and bubbles into _____.
- 5. Sally went behind that old blue _____ to kiss the boys and get her _____ back.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F for false.

- _____ 1. Esperanza hides in the toilet stall from the Chinese man who kissed her on her birthday.
- _____ 2. The police arrest Louie for stealing a Cadillac, after he wrecks it at the end of the alley.
- _____ 3. Unconcerned about the danger, Tito's mother irons while Esperanza weeps for Sally.
- _____ 4. Mr. Cordero sobs because of the death of his father.
- _____ 5. At the baptism party, Uncle Nacho asks Esperanza to dance.
- _____ 6. Angel Vargas falls from the tree while counting nimbus clouds that look like God.
- _____ 7. Marin dances under the streetlight with a man who works in a restaurant.
- _____ 8. Esperanza lies to Sister by pointing to the wrong house.
- _____ 9. Nenny is Esperanza's responsibility.
- _____ 10. Sally's husband keeps her indoors and away from windows and refuses to let friends visit her.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Describe the effect of growing up on Sally and Esperanza.
- 2. Contrast several families on Mango Street, particularly the Vargases and Corderos.
- 3. Discuss the lonely lives of Mamacito, Marin, Ruthie, and Earl.
- 4. Account for girls' interest in red lips, curvy hips, and high heel shoes.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Short Answer (30 points)

Supply an answer to each of the following questions.

- _____ 1. Where does Esperanza get money to pay for a share of the bike?
- _____ 2. Where is P.R.?
- _____ 3. Which of Esperanza's friends looks down on families like the Corderos?
- _____ 4. Why does Esperanza lie to the clerk at the Peter Pan Photo Finishers?
- _____ 5. What street is "all brown all around"?
- _____ 6. Which clouds forecast rain?
- _____ 7. Who teaches Esperanza a dance?
- _____ 8. Who thinks that Esperanza was born bad?
- _____ 9. What does Esperanza buy in the junk store for a dime?
- _____ 10. Who wants Esperanza to keep writing?
- _____ 11. Who is the "witch woman"?
- _____ 12. Who lies about writing children's books?
- _____ 13. Who wants to know, "Cuándo, cuándo, cuándo?"
- _____ 14. Who acts like a man by refusing to put a chair back under the table or pick up the plate?
- _____ 15. What does Alicia say about belonging?

Part II: Description (30 points)

Place an X by every true statement about Esperanza.

- _____ 1. compares hair of family members
- _____ 2. likes papaya and coconut juice poured from bottles in a brown bag
- _____ 3. weeps in the monkey garden
- _____ 4. misunderstands her fortune
- _____ 5. wears new gold earrings at First Communion
- _____ 6. rides in the yellow Cadillac
- _____ 7. refuses to learn English from television
- _____ 8. leaps from a tree and breaks both arms
- _____ 9. likes a purse stitched with the word GUADALAJARA
- _____ 10. spies on the types of women Earl brings to his rented room
- _____ 11. doubts that the mayor will help the people on her street
- _____ 12. must fly back to Mexico for a funeral
- _____ 13. sings of Madame Butterfly
- _____ 14. is humiliated when a nun asks about her house
- _____ 15. shares an attic room with bums

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Matching (20 points)

Match the following endings of sentences with their beginnings.

- _____ 1. but now my fortune begins.
_____ 2. the way she taught me.
_____ 3. like the teddy bears they give away in carnivals.
_____ 4. this means jealousy, and this one, sorrow.
_____ 5. then gets up because the kids are fighting.
_____ 6. spit.
_____ 7. then burn it.
_____ 8. rub a cold egg across your face.
_____ 9. did you lose an anchor of arms, yes, an anchor of arms?
_____ 10. only sometimes they are rude.
- A. This card, the one with the dark man on a dark horse,
B. If you got a headache,
C. I know, I saw it before and recognize the music and wish I could go sit on the plastic couch with Ernie and the baby,
D. Sleep next to a holy candle for seven days, then on the eighth day,
E. I fill it up with hot water from the tap, then put the glass of water on the center of the table,
F. She really does love them,
G. You will go to a wedding soon and
H. Her T.V. is color and big and all her pretty furniture made out of red fur
I. Take a chicken's foot, tie it with red string, spin it over your head three times,
J. That's what I see, she says,

Part IV: Essay (20 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Contrast scenes of Esperanza's fun with friends and pensive moments alone.
2. Describe how the nuns organize school lunch.
3. Give evidence that Esperanza and Sally are maturing.
4. Discuss the significance of Cathy's family's move from Mango Street.
5. Analyze the theme of macho men as it applies to sad and tyrannized women.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

1. double-dutch, tee-tottering
2. intern, notify
3. cumulus, nimbus
4. Spartan, anemic
5. Palm Sunday, voodoo
6. flutter, fuchsia
7. raven, satin
8. opera, velvety
9. soggy, unicorn
10. alley, FM

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Identification (30 points)

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Ruthie | 9. Marin |
| 2. Geraldo | 10. Darius |
| 3. Rosa Vargas | 11. Rafaela |
| 4. Mr. Cordero | 12. Sire |
| 5. Esperanza | 13. Kiki |
| 6. Sally | 14. Esperanza |
| 7. Minerva | 15. Sister Superior |
| 8. three sisters | |

Part II: Completion (20 points)

1. moths, bones
2. tree, Tarzan
3. negatives, prints
4. English, tears
5. pickup, keys

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. F |
| 3. F | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. T | 10. T |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Short Answer (30 points)

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Nenny | 9. Statue of Liberty |
| 2. in the Caribbean | 10. Aunt Lupe |
| 3. Cathy | 11. Elenita |
| 4. to get a job | 12. Ruthie |
| 5. Mango Street | 13. Mamacita |
| 6. nimbus | 14. Esperanza |
| 7. Uncle Nacho | 15. "You are Mango Street" |
| 8. Mrs. Cordero | |

Part II: Completion (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| 1. X | 6. X | 11. X |
| 2. | 7. | 12. |
| 3. X | 8. | 13. |
| 4. X | 9. X | 14. X |
| 5. | 10. | 15. |

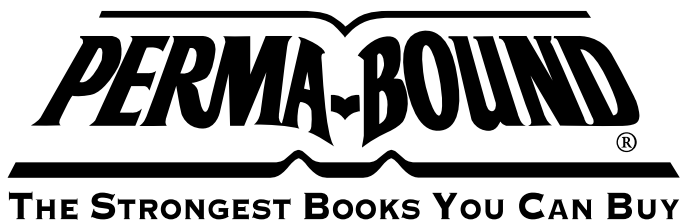
Part III: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. D |
| 2. E | 7. I |
| 3. H | 8. B |
| 4. A | 9. G |
| 5. J | 10. F |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

Teacher's Notes



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