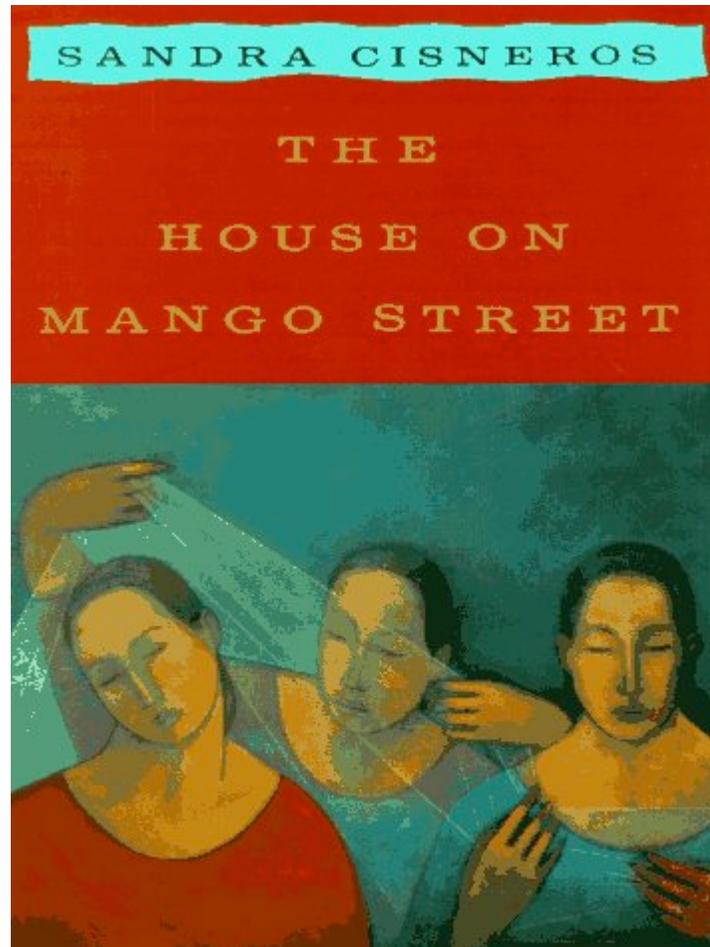


The House on Mango Street



by
Sandra Cisneros

“Like it or not you are Mango Street, and one day you’ll come back too.”

Name: _____ Period: _____

Biography of Author Sandra Cisneros



Born December 20, 1954 in Chicago, Sandra Cisneros is an American novelist, short-story writer, essayist, and poet. Cisneros is one of the first Hispanic-American writers who has achieved commercial success. She is lauded by literary scholars and critics for works which help bring the perspective of Chicana (Mexican-American) women into the mainstream of literary feminism.

Cisneros received her B.A. from Loyola University in 1976 and her M.F.A from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1978. This workshop marks an important turning point in her career as a writer. Cisneros had periodically written poems and stories while growing up, but it was the frustrations she encountered at the Writer's Workshop that inspired Cisneros' realization that her experiences as a Latina woman were unique and outside the realm of dominant American culture. Thus, Cisneros decided to write about conflicts directly related to her upbringing, including divided cultural loyalties, feelings of alienation, and degradation associated with poverty. These specific cultural and social concerns, coupled with Cisneros' feelings of alienation as a Latina writer, came to life five years later in The House on Mango Street (1983).

In addition to writing, Cisneros has taught at the Latino Youth Alternative High School in Chicago and has been a college recruiter and counselor for minority students at Loyola University of Chicago. She served as literature director for the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center in San Antonio, Texas, and was an artist in residence at the Foundation Michael Karolyi in Vence, France. She has been a guest professor at California State University, University of California, Berkeley, University of California, Irvine, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor and the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. Cisneros is also a member of PEN and Mujeres por la Paz, a women's peace group which helps organize.

Cisneros was the only daughter among seven children, and her brothers' attempts to make her assume a traditional female role is reflected in the feminist strains of her writing, glorifying heroines who dream of economic independence and celebrating the "wicked" sexuality of women. The family frequently moved between the United States and Mexico because of her father's homesickness for his native country and his devotion to his mother who lived there. Consequently, Cisneros often felt homeless and displaced. She began to read extensively, finding comfort in such works as Virginia Lee Burton's The Little House and Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Today, Cisneros' works give both solace and realistic lessons about feelings which, as a child, she felt were uniquely hers, namely cultural division, loneliness and shame.

A prime example of how Cisneros' writing speak to the experiences of the forgotten or invisible of American society is The House on Mango Street. In this work, widely celebrated by critics, teachers, adults and adolescents alike, Cisneros introduces the reader to Esperanza - a poor, Latina adolescent who longs for a room of her own and a house of which she can be proud. Although Cisneros is noted primarily for her fiction, her poetry has also garnered attention. In My Wicked, Wicked Ways (1987), Cisneros writes about her native Chicago, her travels in Europe, and, as reflected in the title, sexual guilt resulting from her strict Catholic upbringing. A collection of sixty poems, each of which resemble a short story, the work exemplifies one of Cisneros' acclaimed knack for combining and crossing the boundaries of genre.

Cisneros' other works include Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories (1991), and the poetry collections Bad Boys and Loose Woman (1994). She has also written a book for juveniles, Pelitos (1994). Cisneros has also contributed to numerous periodicals, including *Imagine*, *Contact II*, *Glamour*, *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Village Voice* and *Revista Chicano-Riquena*. These works, short in titles but great in fresh literary ideas and cultural resonance, have garnered Sandra Cisneros wide critical acclaim as well as popular success. By reaching deep into her Chicana-Mexican heritage and articulating sensations of displacement and longing, Sandra Cisneros has created a lasting tribute to those who must conquer similar battles as she, and has thereby left a lasting friend for all who have let their imaginations build a house all their own.

Hairs



1. The narrator describes her mother's hair as being "like little candy circles all curly and pretty." What does this metaphor and those in the next paragraph suggest about the young girl's feelings for her mother?



2. Imitate the author's use of description and similes and metaphors to describe the hair of each of the members of your family, including your own.

Boys and Girls

1. What is the relationship between boys and girls at this stage in the author's life?

2. How old do you think the narrator is? What gives you this impression?

What's In A Name?

1. What is your full name on your birth certificate?
2. How/Why did your parents choose this name?
3. If you were named after someone, what do you know about this person?
4. What do you think of your name? Does it have any special meaning?
5. Do you know anyone else with your name? What do you think of that person?
6. Do you have a nickname? If so, what is it and how did you get it?
7. If you could change your name to any other name, what name would you choose?

Cathy Queen of Cats



Describe a neighbor that you may or may not know and what you think they might be like based on your observations or your imagination. Make sure you give them a unique name such as Cathy Queen of Cats. Draw a picture of this person when you are finished.

Double Journal Entry #1

Quote from Text	Reader's Response
A quote selected from the text of the book that has special significance or meaning.	Your thoughts, feelings, comments about the quote related to the story, author, characters, or your own life.
“In the meantime they’ll just have to move a little farther north from Mango Street, a little farther away every time people like us keep moving in,” (13).	
“If you give me five dollars I will be your friend forever,” (14).	
“And then I don’t know why, but I have to turn around and pretend I don’t care about the box so Nenny won’t see how stupid I am,” (20).	

What Are They Really Like?

Write a short description citing page numbers of what the following characters are really like based on the chapters "Meme Ortiz" and "Louie, His Cousin & His Other Cousin." Also, what are your impressions of these characters based on your descriptions.

Meme Ortiz

Louie

Louie's Cousin (Marin or Maris)

Louie's Other Cousin

Double Journal Entry #2

Quote from Text	Reader's Response
<p>A quote selected from the text of the book that has special significance or meaning.</p>	<p>Your thoughts, feelings, comments about the quote related to the story, author, characters, or your own life.</p>
<p>"Marin, under the streetlight, dancing by herself, is singing the same song somewhere. I know. Is waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life," (27).</p>	
<p>"All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight," (28).</p>	
<p>"They are without respect for all things living, including themselves," (29).</p>	

Double Journal Entry #3

Quote from Text	Reader's Response
A quote selected from the text of the book that has special significance or meaning.	Your thoughts, feelings, comments about the quote related to the story, author, characters, or your own life.
"Is afraid of nothing except four-legged fur. And fathers," (32).	
"God, he said, and made it simple," (34).	
"There ain't thirty different kinds of snow, Lucy says. There are two kinds. The clean kind and the dirty kind, clean and dirty. Only two," (35).	

Double Journal Entry #4

Quote from Text	Reader's Response
A quote selected from the text of the book that has special significance or meaning.	Your thoughts, feelings, comments about the quote related to the story, author, characters, or your own life.
"Bum man says Yes, little girl. Your little lemon shoes are so beautiful. But come closer. I can't see very well. Come closer. Please," (41).	
"We are tired of being beautiful," (42).	
"Everything is fine until the nun who knows all the canteen kids by heart looks at me and says: You, who sent you here?" (44).	

Do The Clothes Make the Person?

Answer After Reading “Sally”

“My mother says to wear black so young is dangerous,” (82).

1. The author often associates being beautiful with being dangerous and needing to be locked up in a house by a husband or parents. Why?

2. Do you think clothes and beauty can be dangerous? Why or why not?

Answer After Reading “A Smart Cookie”

“Shame is a bad thing, you know. It keeps you down. You want to know why I quit school? Because I didn't have nice clothes. No clothes, but I had brains,” (91).

3. Can you understand why Esperanza's mother quit school because she did not have nice clothes to wear and she was ashamed of this? Why or why not?

4. When did Esperanza feel the same way about herself earlier in the story? Do you think she can understand her mother's feelings?

5. Will Esperanza follow her mother's advice to “study hard”? What do you think Esperanza will do in the future? Why?

Boys and Girls Revisited

In the story "Boys and Girls," Esperanza says "The boys and the girls live in separate worlds," (8). We can assume that she is still a young child at this point in the story and has a limited understanding of boys or men. As Esperanza grows up and has new life experiences, however, her view of men changes dramatically. In "Beautiful and Cruel" she says "I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain," (88). On this page, explain what significant event happens in each chapter and how this experience provides Esperanza with a different view of men and her relationship to them.

Chapter	Important Event	Esperanza's View of Men
The First Job		
The Earl of Tennessee		
Sire		
Beautiful and Cruel		
The Monkey Garden		
Red Clowns		

How would you sum up the book's depiction of relations between the sexes based on the vignettes above and others you read in The House on Mango Street?

How might The House on Mango Street be different if the narrator were a boy?

Double Journal Entry #5

Quote from Text	Reader's Response
A quote selected from the text of the book that has special significance or meaning.	Your thoughts, feelings, comments about the quote related to the story, author, characters, or your own life.
"Because I am the oldest my father has told me first, and now it is my turn to tell the others. I will have to explain why we can't play," (56).	
"We didn't know. She had been dying for such a long time, we forgot. Maybe she was ashamed. Maybe she was embarrassed it took so many years," (61).	
"A new house, a house made of heart. I'll light a candle for you," (64).	

You Know The Kind

No matter what our culture or history, we are all sensitive to the derogatory names and negative attitudes others say about us, even if they are members of our own culture. Classism. Racism. Hatred. These are all real forms of discrimination that live and breathe in our own neighborhood.

1. What does the story "Geraldo, No Last Name" reveal about the way Hispanics view others from Mexico in a negative way with embarrassment and shame?

2. Why do you think there is a negative attitude toward this group of Hispanic people even among those who live on Mango Street?

3. Is this same situation present in your own culture? Why or why not?

4. What is the danger of speaking about people this way, as if they don't matter?

5. Do you think these were Marin's true feelings about Geraldo? Why or why not?

Role Models

Esperanza is exposed to several female role models throughout her life experience on Mango Street. After reading each of the following chapters, explain what happened of significance to the individual woman described in the chapter and how the person is a positive or negative female role model for Esperanza.

Chapter	Individual	What Happened & How The Person Is A Role Model
Edna's Ruthie	Ruthie	
Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut ...	Rafaela	
Sally	Sally	
Minerva Writes Poems	Minerva	

Name three of your own role models and explain why they have had a positive and/or negative influence on your life.

1.

2.

3.

Double Journal Entry #6

Quote from Text	Reader's Response
A quote selected from the text of the book that has special significance or meaning.	Your thoughts, feelings, comments about the quote related to the story, author, characters, or your own life.
"Everything is holding its breath inside me. Everything is waiting to explode like Christmas," (73).	
"They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here," (74).	
"And then to break her heart forever, the baby boy who had begun to talk, starts to sing he Pepsi commercial he heard on T.V.," (78).	

Double Journal Entry #7

Quote from Text	Reader's Response
A quote selected from the text of the book that has special significance or meaning.	Your thoughts, feelings, comments about the quote related to the story, author, characters, or your own life.
"I don't tell them I am ashamed - all of us staring out the window like the hungry. I am tired of looking at what we can't have. When we win the lottery . . . Mama begins, and then I stop listening," (86).	
"He never hits me hard. She said her mama rubs lard on all the places where it hurts," (92).	
"They all lied. All the books and magazines, everything that told it wrong. Only his dirty fingernails against my skin, only his sour smell again," (100).	

Escaping Where You Come From

The theme of escape is weaved throughout many of the stories in The House on Mango Street and nearly all of the residents dream of escaping their neighborhood. It is important to remember that while many of the residents may have left Mexico voluntarily in search of a better opportunity and lifestyle in the United States, the ancestors of others may simply have found themselves in alien territory as a result of the U.S.'s expansionist policy into areas that had once been Mexico.

Answer After Reading “Linoleum Roses”

1. How is Sally able to leave Mango Street?
2. Has she found the kind of freedom Esperanza is searching for? Why or why not?
3. What has Sally gained and what has she lost by leaving Mango Street?

Answer After Reading “The Three Sisters”

4. What does Esperanza wish for?
5. What did the three sisters mean when they said “you must remember to come back for the others”?
6. What is the circle they are referring to?
7. Will Esperanza follow their advice? Why or why not?

Escaping Where You Come From

Answer After Reading “Alicia & I Talking on the Steps”

1. Why does Esperanza feel like she doesn't belong in her neighborhood?
2. Is her shame of where she comes from understandable? Why or why not?

Answer After Reading “A House of My Own”

3. What does Esperanza mean by the description of her dream home as “only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before a poem”?
4. What is most important to her and why?

Answer After Reading “Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes”

5. What is Esperanza's strength that will allow her to leave Mango Street one day?
6. How might a writer like Cisneros come to terms with leaving a place like Mango Street?
7. How has Cisneros done this based on what you have read about her new home in San Antonio?
8. In your opinion, has Cisneros completed the circle the Three Sisters talked about? Why or why not?

Freedom - Something Different for Everyone

1. What specifically do the residents of Mango Street want to escape from or leave behind?
2. How does being poor - as most of these characters are - affect their chances of escaping a dead-end neighborhood or fulfilling their dreams?
3. What does freedom mean to you?
4. What activity gives you a sense of freedom?
5. Describe how you feel when your are doing this activity?
6. How would you choose to remain faithful to a place you needed to leave?