

# Excerpts from *The House on Mango Street*

By Sandra Cisneros

## Author Bio

Sandra Cisneros was born in 1954 in Chicago, Illinois to a large family of eight, and is a first generation Mexican-American who writes about the various cultures and classes of which she has been exposed. She has also spent a lot of her life migrating between Mexico and America and has described feeling a sense of alienation in both communities.

Outside of being a renowned writer in Chicano literature, she has worked as a teacher and counselor, a college recruiter, an arts administrator, and as a visiting writer at a number of universities including the University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.”<sup>1</sup>



## Background/Historical Information:

*The House on Mango Street* is a collection of vignettes (a short, descriptive passage that captures a moment in time) portraying Esperanza, a young girl in Chicago, as she grows up and manages her multiple roles: as a sister, daughter, student, worker, girl, woman, and artist. Cisneros aimed to create a novel absent from libraries and classrooms, one that captured the female perspective in the neighborhood rather than the confident tales of males.<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this reading, we will be focusing on the vignettes that shed light on both her relationship with her home and community.

## Terms to know:

- **Characterization:** the process by which an author reveals and develops the **personalities, traits, and qualities** of characters in a story. It involves describing the characters' **physical appearance, thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and interactions** to make them come to life and feel real to the reader.
- **Imagery:** the author's use of **descriptive language** to **create vivid sensory experiences** for the reader. It appeals to the five senses—**sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch**—helping to paint a picture in the reader's mind and evoke emotions.
- **Simile:** a figure of speech that **compares two unlike things** using the words **"like" or "as."**
- **Metaphor:** a figure of speech that directly compares two unlike things **without using "like" or "as."** Instead, it states that one thing is another, **implying a deeper, symbolic connection** between them.
- **Personification:** when **human** qualities, characteristics, or actions are **attributed** to **non-human entities**, such as animals, objects, or abstract concepts.
- **Hyperbole:** the use of **extreme exaggeration** to emphasize a point or create a **strong impression**. It is not meant to be taken literally; instead, it is used for **dramatic effect** or to convey **strong emotions**.
- **Symbolism:** an **image** that represents something **beyond the literal meaning**. It is an object, often ordinary and commonplace, that has been imbued with extraordinary significance.

<sup>1</sup> Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Cornett, Doug. "Big Picture, Small Picture: Context for Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*." *Ploughshares*, 4 Jan. 2017.

Part 1: Read and Annotate

**Directions:** Read the short story below. Stop and answer the active reading questions in red. Think carefully about the unit’s essential question, and highlight and **add at least 4 comments** to help you deepen your understanding of the text in relation to the question.

<p><b><u>Essential Question:</u></b></p> <p>How does one’s environment impact their identity, values, beliefs, and/or connection with others?</p>	<p><b><u>Highlighting Guide:</u></b></p> <p>Figurative Language: <b>Pink</b></p> <p>Setting/Imagery: <b>Green</b></p> <p>Symbols: <b>Blue</b></p>
---	---

Excerpts	4 Annotations
<p><b>“The House on Mango Street”</b></p> <p>We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that I can't remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot. Each time it seemed there'd be one more of us. By the time we got to Mango Street we were six-Mama, Papa, Carlos, Kiki, my sister Nenny and me.</p> <p>The house on Mango Street is ours, and we don't have to pay rent to anybody, or share the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not to make too much noise, and there isn't a landlord banging on the ceiling with a broom. But even so, it's not the house we'd thought we'd get.</p> <p>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. We were using the washroom next door and carrying water over in empty milk gallons. That's why Mama and Papa looked for a house, and that's why we moved into the house on Mango Street, far away, on the other side of town.</p> <p>They always told us that one day we would move into a house, a real house that would be ours for always so we wouldn't have to move each year. And our house would have running water and pipes that worked. And inside it would have real stairs, not hallway stairs, but stairs inside like the houses on T.V. And we'd have a basement and at least three washrooms so when we took a bath we wouldn't have to tell everybody. Our house would be white with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence. This was the house Papa talked about when he held a lottery ticket and this was the house Mama dreamed up in the stories she told us before we went to bed.</p> <p>But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all. It's small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath. Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in. There is no front</p>	

yard, only four little elms the city planted by the curb. Out back is a small garage for the car we don't own yet and a small yard that looks smaller between the two buildings on either side. There are stairs in our house, but they're ordinary hallway stairs, and the house has only one washroom. Everybody has to share a bedroom-Mama and Papa, Carlos and Kiki, me and Nenny. ...

I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it. For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I know how those things go.

**STOP Active Reading:** Compare Esperanza's family's expectations of their future house with the reality of the house on Mango Street. What does this disparity reveal about their aspirations and their current circumstances?

Answer:

### **“Bums in the Attic”**

I want a house on a hill like the ones with the gardens where Papa works. We go on Sundays, Papa's day off. I used to go. I don't anymore. You don't like to go out with us, Papa says. Getting too old? Getting too stuck-up, says Nenny. 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.

People who live on hills sleep so close to the stars they forget those of us who live too much on earth. They don't look down at all except to be content to live on hills. They have nothing to do with last week's garbage or fear of rats. Night comes. Nothing wakes them but the wind.

One day I'll own my own house, but I won't forget who I am or where I came from. Passing bums will ask, Can I come in? I'll offer them the attic, ask them to stay, because I know how it is to be without a house.

Some days after dinner, guests and I will sit in front of a fire. Floorboards will squeak upstairs. The attic grum-ble.

Rats? they'll ask.

Bums, I'll say, and I'll be happy.

**STOP Active Reading:** How does Esperanza's empathy for the “bums” and her ultimate willingness to return to Mango Street reflect her values and understanding of homelessness and poverty? What does this reveal about her character?

Answer:

### **“Alicia & I Talking on Edna's Steps”**

I like Alicia because once she gave me a little leather purse with the word GUADALAJARA stitched on it, which is home for Alicia, and one day she will go back there. But today she is listening to my sadness because I don't have a house.

<p>You live right here, 4006 Mango, Alicia says and points to the house I am ashamed of.</p> <p>No, this isn't my house I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I've lived here. I don't belong. I don't ever want to come from here. You have a home, Alicia, and one day you'll go there, to a town you remember, but me I never had a house, not even a photograph... only one I dream of.</p> <p>No, Alicia says. Like it or not you are Mango Street, and one day you'll come back too.</p> <p>Not me. Not until somebody makes it better.</p> <p>Who's going to do it? The mayor?</p> <p>And the thought of the mayor coming to Mango Street makes me laugh out loud.</p> <p>Who's going to do it? Not the mayor.</p>	
---	--

**STOP Active Reading:** How does this vignette reveal both hope and hopelessness regarding her relationship with the house on Mango Street?

Answer:

<p>I make a story for my own life, for each step my brown shoe takes. I say, "And so she trudged up the wooden stairs, her sad brown shoes taking her to the house she never liked."</p> <p>I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong.</p> <p>We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, but what I remember most is Mango Street, sad red house, the house I belong but do not belong to.</p> <p>I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free.</p> <p>One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away.</p> <p>Friends and neighbors will say, What happened to that Esperanza? Where did she go with all those books and paper? Why did she march so far away? They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out.</p>	
--	--

**STOP Active Reading:** Analyze the symbolism of Esperanza writing down her experiences and feelings about Mango Street.

Answer:

## Part 2: Writing Practice

**Directions:** Answer the following prompt by creating a strong [claim](#) and [integrating two quotes](#) that support it. Remember, a strong claim has a [Topic](#) + [Verb](#) + [Argument](#) + [So What?](#) And that good quote integration requires a sentence of context before the sentence with the quote.

**Prompt:** *In the vignettes we have read, there are a variety of symbols to choose from: the house, the attic, the hill, the brown shoes. Pick one and explain what message/theme about identity Sandra Cisneros' reveal through the symbol?*

**Claim:** Sandra Cisneros' symbol of \_\_\_\_\_ reveals that \_\_\_\_\_, which \_\_\_\_\_.

**Integrated Evidence 1:**

**Integrated Evidence 2:**

**How do these pieces of evidence support your claim and So What?**

**Checklist:**

- ☐ Do both of your quotes support your claim?
- ☐ Did you provide context for each of the quotes you selected?
- ☐ Is there enough information presented in the quote's context that will help readers understand the significance of the quote?
- ☐ Did you blend or well-blend your quotes?
- ☐ Are both of your quotes properly cited?