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The house on mango street literature guide

© 1996-2014, Amazon.com, Inc. or its affiliates Switch to basic content NOTE TEACHERS House on Mango Street is a deceptive job. It's a book of short stories, and sometimes not even full of stories, but character sketches and vignettes that add, as Sandra Cisneros wrote: to tell one great story, each story contributes to a whole, like beads of beads. This story tells a language that seems simple but has the associative richness of poetry and whose slang and breaks from grammatical correctness contribute to its betaactivity. It tells girls, girls too young to know that no one has ever heard of it, but whose voice is completely convincing, in the voice, because it is the creation of a mature and complex writer. For example, the house on Mango Street seems to roam casually from the theme-to-the-hip, from clouds to feet, from an invalid aunt to a girl named Sally, who has eyes like Egypt and whose father sometimes beats her. But this obvious coincidence disguises the artistic exploration themes of individual identity and community fidelity, estrangement and loss, escape and return, romance grooming and deadlock sexual inequality and oppression. House of Mango Street is also a book about the culture that Chicanos, or Mexican Americans, have long been masked by demeaning stereotypes and suffering internal ambivalence. In some ways it's similar to the immigrant culture that your students may encounter in books like My Antonia, Jungle, and Call It Sleep. But unlike American Slavic or Jewish ancestors, Chicanos have been systematically removed from America's core ways that show african Americans voting rights. While Cisneros uses language as a recurring metaphor between Mexican Americans and the vast majority of cultural gulfs, what keeps Esperanza Cordero and her family and friends locked in their barrio is something more restrained than language: the confluence of racism, poverty and shame. This may help your discussion remind students that many chicana ancestors did not come to the United States of Choice, but simply found themselves in alien territory as a result of U.S. expansionist policies in a country that was once Mexican. But while The House on Mango Street will have a particularly great appeal to Latino students who have never been able to come across a book that so pointedly speaks to their experiences, it is a work that captures the universal suffering of others, what Cisneros, in its introduction to the ten-year edition (published by Knopf, \$18.00), has been called a disgrace to be poor, to be women, not good enough. It shows where that other comes from and shows how it can become a cause of celebration rather than shame. Few students, their ancestors or gender will come from this book without a strong sensation having glimpsed the secret part of themselves. Because, as Sandra Cisneros wrote: You, reader, esperanza.... You can't forget who you are. ABOUT THIS AUTHORSandra Cisneros was born in Chicago in 1954. She worked as a teacher for high school dropouts, poet-in-the-schools, college recruiter, and arts administrator. Internationally recognized for her poetry and fiction, and the recipient of many awards, Cisneros is also the author of The Woman Hollering Creek and other stories, My Wicked Wicked Ways and Loose Woman. The daughter of a Mexican father and a Mexican-American mother and sister to six brothers, she is no mother and no one's wife. She lives in San Antonio, Texas, and is currently working on an affair. TEACHING IDEASKlausias, exercises and tasks that follow are designed to guide their students through the house on Mango Street and help them turn to it as a literary work and window into their lives. They are divided into chapters that test reading understanding, invite into a class discussion and offer independent research and writing techniques. Students should be encouraged to keep journals in which they write their answers to work, ask questions to the teacher, and write notes about their written tasks. We believe that Mango Street Homes is particularly valuable as an opportunity for students to think and write about their experiences: their homes, their families, their neighborhoods, their dreams and frustrations, how they relate to the other sex, about the kinds of life they want and the kinds they fear they may end up living. This is a book that invites empathy as well as critical intelligence. At different points in your discussions, you can ask students about the different feelings of esperanza history, with a special focus on the different ways of responding to girls and boys. DISCUSSION AND WRITING. Understanding 1. Where did the narrator live before moving to a house on Mango Street? How was her previous home different?2. What house would she like to live in? Does her new home live up to her expectations? why not? Hair 3. Who are the members of the Esperanza family? My name is 4. What was esperanza after? What does her namesake story tell us about the status of women in Mexican society? Cathy Cat Queen 5. Why is Kathy's family about to move? Our Good Day 6. How did Esperanza make friends with Lucy and Rachel? Why are they better friends than Cathy? Marin7. What is Marino? Why can't she leave her house? How does she plan to change her situation? Why do Esperanza and her friends admire her? Those who don't have 8. How do outsiders see esperanza? How it works feel when she visits other neighborhoods? There was an old woman she had so many children she didn't know what to do at 9. Why does Rosa Vargas cry every day? Why are her children misbehaving? What happens to her son Angel? Alicia Who sees mice 10. How does Alicia's father do his efforts to get an education? Little Feet family11. What happens to Esperanza when she and her friends are given some cast-off shoes? How do shoes replace them? What impact do they have on the essence of the neighbourhood? Rice sandwich12. Why does Esperanza want to eat in the school canteen? How does she get her mother to help her? Clubs13. What do girls do when they talk about clubs? What are the clubs good for? What does their conversation say about their age? First job14. Why does this story have a misleading name? What will happen to Esperanzai on the first day of work? What does this episode tell you about your family and their expectations? Dad who wakes tired in the dark at 15. Why is Esperanza's father crying? How does his crying make her feel? Born bad16. What happens to Aunt Lupe? Why does Esperanza think she deserves to go to hell? What special relationship did Esperanza have with her aunt? Geraldo No Last Name 17. Why doesn't Geraldo have a surname? Do you think that his death was imminent from the information provided by Cisnera? Your majesty... 18. Why is Esperanza afraid of Sire? What do her parents think of him? Why is she so curious about what he's doing with Lois, and why does this curiosity make her feel as if everything is holding her breath inside me [73]? Don't speak English 19. What do the eight English words or, indeed, phrases know? What will they tell you about how Mexican immigrants relate to an official, English-speaking culture outside their communities? Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice Tuesdays20. What makes Rafaela getting older? Who was Rapunzel, and why did Rafaela dream of having hair like her? Sally21. Describe the relationship between Sally and her father. How do her school friends see her? What transformation happens when Sally comes home? Minerva writes poems22. Why does Minerva write poems? Why is it black and blue when you come to visit Esperanza? Bums attic 23. What does Esperanza's father do for life? Why did Esperanza stop joining her family on Sunday leaving? Beautiful & Cruel24. What is the nature of esperanza silent war [89]? What is she fighting against, or what? Smart Cookie25. How do you categorize what Esperanza's mother knows? What things can she not know that esperanza works? Why do you think she left school? Monkey Garden/Red Clowns/Linoleum Roses26. How does the Monkey Garden change? What does Sally do, why is Esperanza so angry? What is she trying to save her from? What finally happens to How does Esperanza feel about their marriage? Three sisters27. How does Esperanza meet three sisters? What future do they predict for her? What is their responsibility to her? Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes28. How does the end of The House on Mango street end the circle? II. Language: image, metaphor and voice 1. Throughout the book Cisneros has Esperanza employing common idioms phrases that serve as a kind of shorthand. Analyze some of these phrases and suggest what esperanza means and what the author means to tell you about esperanza: a) But I know how these things are going. [5] (b) people like us [13] (c) We accept what we can get and make the most of [33]d) Ain't a shame [66] e) Same story [85]2. In the history of Hair, Esperanza describes her mother's hair as like a little candy circle all curly and beautiful. [6] What does this metaphor and the next paragraph suggest about Esperanza's feelings for her mother? Where else in the book is the metaphor and simile to convey information about the narrator, as well as about the person or what it describes?3. Gil's Furniture Bought and Sold, Cisneros describes the sound of the old music box: It's like all of a sudden he let go of a million moths all over the dusty furniture and the shadows of the swan's neck in our bones. [20] This method, in which the sound is characterized by visible and felt things, is called sinesthesia. Where else does the book Cisneros use sinesthesia? Write descriptions: (a) location using sounds; (b) a piece of music using odours; (c) meals using colours; (d) a person using taste and touch.4. To Boys & Girls, Esperanza describes himself as a balloon tied to an anchor. [9] What is the connotations of this metaphor and what does it tell you about Esperance? Where else does cisneros use images and metaphors related to the sky in the book Cisneros? What ideas do these repetitive images cause? Where else does Sandra Cisneros use related images to offer complex themes?5. Chanclas, embarrassed by Esperanza, rejects her cousin's invitation to dance as her legs grow and grow. What Cisneros describes is not a literal reality, but a feeling that in turn shows other feelings. In this case, Esperanza's sense of legs tells of her self-esteem and shame. Where else does the author use this technique? Describe these situations in terms of the sensations they may cause in different parts of your body: (a) entering the dark cellar b) seeing the death of a pet (c) when you learn that someone who secretly cares about you also likes you) speaking at the end of your high school e) first seeing the baby's brother or sister.6 The last sentence of the book is: For those who can not leave. [110] Strictly speaking, the sentence is non-gram, out is not a verb. Why do you think Cisneros decided to break the perceived grammar rules here? Could there be any connection between breaking grammar and getting out of Mango Street? III. Mango Street 1 people. Why do you think Cisneros tells the reader about Esperanza's house while she writes about her name? Why does esperanza live more important than what it is?2. How old do you think esperanza is? Where does cisneros show her age?3 in the book. What is esperanza shame?4. Why is she crying? 5. What makes her angry?6. How does it feel about the men in the Little Feet family, Chanclas, First Job, Sire and Red Clowns?7. Throughout the house on Mango Street, the Csneros narrator describes herself in two ways: how she sees herself and how she thinks others see her. We can find this example in my name: At school they say my name is funny, as if the syllables were made of tin and hurt the roof of my mouth. [11] Where else does cisneros convey this double consciousness in the book? How does Esperanza see itself? How does she think other people perceive her?8. While Esperanza is smart and often very insightful, she is still a child, and Cisneros sometimes shows the importance of her inability to see things that would be obvious to someone older. For example, it can be found on pages 24-5, when Esperanza and her friends ride in a chic car driven by Louie's cousin, who is quickly arrested by the police. An adult may be suspicious about a new car and probably didn't wave so cheerfully when Louie was taken away. What effect does Esperans, what is sometimes called an unreliable narrator? Where else in history does Cisneros use this technique?9. At the end of the novel Esperanza declares that she is too strong on Mango Street to keep her forever. What is the nature of its strength? How does Cisneros determine this feature elsewhere in the book?10. What is the significance of information in so many chapter titles, namely Alicia Who Sees Mice, Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark, Minerva writes poems? How important is this information in your sense of who these people are? What other information does Cisneros use to identify them? How would your feelings of these people change if the author employs other information, what do they look like, what they are wearing, what they do for life?IV. Topics: home; boys and girls/ men and women; owned and non-owned; departs and returns 1. After re-reading the sections of House on Mango Street, Bums in the Attic and A House of My Own, write a description of esperanza's home. How does she feel about it? How do you think her house might look like a stranger? What house would she like to live in?2. Boys and girls [8-9] Cisneros writes: Boys and girls live separately Beautiful & Cruel is a declaration I decided not to grow tame, like others who lay their necks on the doorstep waiting for the ball and chain. [88] How would you describe the relevant worlds in which the boys and girls of Cisnera live? What men and women can they become when they grow up? How would you summarize the depiction of the relationship between the sexes in the book? Use incidents and descriptions in stories such as My Name, Marin, Alicia Who Sees Mice, Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut and Papaya Juice Tuesdays, Sally, Minerva writes poems, Beautiful & Cruel, Sally Says and

The Monkey Garden. 3. Esperanza describes several females as possible role models: Marin [26-7], Alicia [31-2], Sire's girlfriend Lois [72-3], Sally [81-3, 92-8]. What does she admire these women? What things can they teach her?4. In my name and Untalked English stories, Cisneros describes a gap between two languages, meaning and feeling. For example, in English Esperanza means hope; in Spanish, says the narrator, he offers sadness and waits [10]. How does Esperanza feel about two languages and, moreover, about two cultures? How does she feel about society behind her barrio? Look especially at the chapters Cathy Queen of Cats, Those Who Don't, Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark, Geraldo No Last Name and Bums in the Attic. 5. When Esperanza visits Elenita to have her fate told, the witch tells her that she sees the arms anchor and the heart of the house. What is the potential meaning of these visions? How do they relate to topics Cisneros develops elsewhere in the book?6. Almost all cisnera books dream of escaping characters. What do they want to leave? Describe the ways in which different people try to escape, as well as the result of their efforts. Do you think esperanza dreams of escaping can be more successful? How is it poor because most of these characters are affected by their ability to escape the deadlock in the neighborhood or fulfill other dreams? 7. Aunt Lupe tells Esperanza that writing you for free. How can writing be an avenue of freedom? What does freedom mean to you? What kind of activity gives you a sense of freedom?8. Three sisters say to Esperanza: When you leave you have to remember to come back to others. What do they mean for this? How does Esperanza reconcile his desires to escape mango street with his faithfulness to his origin? How can a Cisneros writer come to terms with leaving a place like Mango Street? How would you decide to remain in the faithful place you needed to leave? FOR THE BOOK1. Write a description of your home using a language that tells the reader both how it looks and how you feel about it. Then write to the house where the enjoy living. 2. Read Hair, Laughter, Papa Who Wakes Tired in The Dark, and Born Bad, paying special attention to the language with which Esperanza describes his family members. Then write a description of your family using metaphors that not only tell the reader how your relatives look, but it shows how you feel about them. 3. After re-reading the story my name, write about my name. Who gave it to you? What language is it from? What does your name mean at first? If you were named after someone from your family, tell the story of that person. How good is your name right for you? If you are going to rename yourself, what name would you choose and why? 4. Esperanza describes four skinny trees as four that do not belong here but are here, [74] How does this description reflect her own feeling? Where else in the book cisneros explore the estrangement of his heroine's feelings? Write a description of the object in your neighborhood that reflects your feelings about yourself. 5. Cisneros offers a single image of chicano culture house on Mango Street-view of its main character seen from his street in Chicago. How does this chicano cultural image fit into a larger social fabric in the United States? What are the ceremonies and values that distinguish it? What value does it assign to women? On the basis of independent studies, a different or more detailed picture of this culture shall be provided.6. How can a house on Mango Street be different if the narrator was a boy? 7. As a book similar to or different from other books, can you be read to feature young storytellers like Catcher in the Adventures of Rye, Ellen Foster, or Huckleberry Finn? ABOUT THIS GUIDEThis teacher's guide was written by Peter Trachtenberg. Peter Trachtenberg taught writing and literature at New York University's School of Continuing Education, Johns Hopkins University's School of Continuing Education, and the School of Visual Arts ©.

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