The House on Mango Street

by Sandra Cisneros
Sandra Cisneros

- Born 1954 in Chicago
- Poet, Writer
- Mexican American Woman
- Attended Loyola University to study English
- Iowa Writer’s Workshop – Poetry section
- First Mexican American to receive a major publishing contract
- Nobody’s wife
- Nobody’s mother
Culture and Influence

- Blending of Native and Catholic Religion
- Family structure
- Diversity within the Hispanic Community
- Historical Context
I am Joaquín.
Our Hispanic Heritage

- Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
- Immigration encouraged to fill low cost labor needs of railroads, agriculture, mining, etc
- The Deportation Act of 1929 and Repatriation
- Cesar Chavez and Delores Huerta; United Farm Workers of America
- Climate Today
Those Who Don’t

- Those who don’t know any better….
- Geraldo No Last Name
- No Speak English

...So what else is the book about?
Plot

Chicano culture is woven throughout the text. The House on Mango Street is, however, essentially about the growing consciousness of Esperanza of her place in the world, her differences and similarities with her family and community, her sexuality, and her dreams.
Autobiography

As Esperanza struggles with her identity and direction, she is mirroring the struggle of Sandra Cisneros to find her own authentic voice in a world often hostile to her sex and culture.
Autobiographical Aspects

- Similar to Paulsen in Nightjohn—Cisneros takes memories/events from her own life and from the life of students she has worked with and creates fictional accounts.
- Cisneros grew up poor and Hispanic in Chicago.
- Her family moved a great deal.
- She wrote as a child.
- The “house” metaphor has great significance for her.
The House…

- The house in the text serves as metaphor for what Esperanza is running from and to.

- To understand it fully we need to be aware of the meaning the house has for Cisneros.
● Importance
● The Little House by Virginia Burton
● The House on Mango Street
● The Poetics of Space by Gaston Bachelard
● Virginia Wolfe
● A House of My Own
“I like to tell stories.”

“I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn’t want to belong.”

Sandra Cisneros speaking as Esperanza Cordova in *The House on Mango Street.*
My Story

- Our house and the shame of poverty
- Diversity – (Hairs, p6)
- Boys and Girls live in separate worlds
- My Name and the blending of two cultures

- My Great-grandmother
- Marin
- Sally
- Alicia
- Aunt Lupe
- My Mom (the smart cookie)
Esperanza Learns

- The Greek Fates aka The Three Sisters
- Beautiful and Cruel
- Four Skinny Trees

- Keep Writing p61
- Bums p86
- Mango says goodbye sometimes
They will not know I have gone away to come back.

For the ones I left behind.

For the ones that cannot out.
A las Mujeres

To the Women
Language

- Impressionist
- Quality over quantity
- Emotional quality
- Rich and poetic
- Aural quality
- Shows the influence of the Spanish language

Cisneros “paints” an image or impression with words.
Terms to Know

- **Metaphor** – to allude to a comparison between two dissimilar things
- **Simile** – to explicitly compare two dissimilar things (use words such as “as” or “like”)
- **Vignette** – a short, graceful literary sketch
- **Synesthesia** – the technique of describing a sound in terms of things seen and felt
Genre?

- Autobiographical
- Narrative
- Coming-of-age
- Short Story/Novel
- Poetry/Prose
- Feminist
- Hispanic
- “testimonio”
Trouble Spots

- Recommended for Grades 8 and up (individual vignettes may be used with younger readers)
- Child/wife abuse
- Sexual implications of Sally’s behavior
- The rape of Esperanza in “Red Clowns”
- Be prepared to discuss the prejudice and social implications of the book
Related Texts

- Catcher in Rye; Huckleberry Finn
- Esperanza Rising; Baseball in April
- Woman Hollering Creek; Nilda
- Bless Me Ultima; Across the Wire
Related Media

- Sound Recording *House on Mango Street; Woman Hollering Creek* –read by Sandra Cisneros; pub 1992 by Random House
Other Works by Cisneros

- My Wicked, Wicked Ways
- Woman Hollering Creek
- Loose Woman
- a Spanish version of The House on Mango Street
- Hairs/Pelitos (for children 4-8)
- and a new novel, Caramelo
One of the best means of combating the disassociation and depersonalization of young lives is through story, either fictional or informational narratives. Engagement with story is life-affirming; it puts us in touch with the world, with one another, and with our essential selves. Story also empowers readers to create wholeness, to make meanings that unify our own fragmented experiences and ideas with those expressed in story. Story helps us shape and reshape life, to give it importance and to reflect on who we are and who we might become.

Kay E. Vandergrift
(from Mosaics of Meaning)
Bibliography

- The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros
- Baseball in April by Gary Soto
- Esperanza Rising by Pam Munoz Ryan
- Bless me Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya
- Mosaics of Meaning by K. Vandergrift
- http://odin.english.udel.edu/josephk/usia/maflapr.htm
- Novels for Students, Gale Research Corp. Volume 2, pages 113-132