

from **The House on Mango Street**

Fiction by Sandra Cisneros

# What **STORIES** will you tell your children?

**COMMON CORE**

**RL 1** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. **RL 3** Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text. **RL 4** Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone. **L 5a** Interpret figures of speech in context and analyze their role in the text.

Whether it's a tale about the sweet taste of victory or a description of a devastating loss, you have important stories to tell. These stories, if you choose to tell them, will someday be the next generation's legacy—stories, beliefs, and traditions passed on from one generation to the next.

**PRESENT** With a classmate, share a few stories you might want to tell your kids someday. Then pick your favorite—maybe it's the funniest, or the most outrageous, or the one that says the most about you. With a small group, take turns telling your chosen tales. Explain why these are the stories you would pass on to the next generation.



## ● TEXT ANALYSIS: AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Just as your own experiences influence the way you think about different issues, a writer's personal experiences affect the way he or she approaches a topic. When you analyze an **author's perspective**, or point of view, you work to figure out how the writer looks at his or her subject. As you read this excerpt from *The House on Mango Street*, think about Sandra Cisneros's perspective on the narrator's circumstances.

- Pay attention to the writer's choice of details. In these vignettes, Cisneros describes a rundown house in vivid detail. What do her descriptions of its small windows, crumbling bricks, and tiny yard help emphasize?
- Consider direct statements of the narrator's thoughts or feelings. What kind of person is she?

As you read, consider what these details and statements reveal about Cisneros's ideas, as well as her feelings about what it's like to grow up in a place like the house on Mango Street.

**Review: Tone**

## ● READING SKILL: MAKE INFERENCES ABOUT CHARACTER

Writers don't usually spell out every single thing their characters are thinking and feeling. They often leave it up to the reader to **make inferences** about what isn't directly stated. As you read the following vignettes, keep track of significant details that tell you something about the narrator's background, personality, and feelings. Then record the inferences you can draw from these details.

Details from the Text	My Inferences
<i>Esperanz-a's family has moved around a lot, and she doesn't sound very happy about that. (lines 1-3)</i>	<i>Esperanz-a probably wishes her family could just stay in one place and not move around so much.</i>
<i>When the family moves to Mango Street, they finally get their own house. But Esperanz-a says that "it's not the house we'd thought we'd get." (line 9)</i>	



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

## Sandra Cisneros

born 1954

### Defining Her Destiny

Sandra Cisneros grew up in a male-dominated household where her father and six brothers were the authority figures. She quietly rebelled against the traditional role she was expected to play as a Mexican-American female, writing in secret until she went away to college. The author now uses her work to give voice to the experiences of Mexican-American women. "I'm trying to write the stories that haven't been written," Cisneros explains. "I'm determined to fill a literary void."

### Latina Power

Much of Cisneros's writing deals with the shame of poverty and the guilt that comes with rejecting certain aspects of one's culture. Her poetry and prose have received critical acclaim. "I am a woman and I am a Latina," the author says proudly. "Those are the things that make my writing distinctive. Those are the things that give my writing power."

### BACKGROUND TO THE SELECTION

#### No Place Like Home

When Cisneros was young, her family moved frequently from Chicago to Mexico City and back again. She never remained in one place long enough to make close friends, and she longed for a "perfect" house like the ones she read about and saw on TV. When she was 11, Cisneros and her family finally moved into a shabby house in a poor Chicago neighborhood. The rundown house was not the dream home she had longed for. Esperanza Cordero, the narrator of *The House on Mango Street*, faces similar issues.

Author  
Online



Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com).  
KEYWORD: HML9-613



# *The House on* *Mango Street*

Sandra Cisneros

## *The House on Mango Street*

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.

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.

10 We had to leave the flat<sup>1</sup> 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. **A**

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 TV. And

### Analyze Visuals ▶

What effect is created by the heightened colors and blurred lines in this image? Explain your answer.

### **A** MAKE INFERENCES ABOUT CHARACTER

Reread lines 6–14. What can you infer about the family's economic circumstances? Explain your answer.

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1. **flat**: an apartment on one floor of a building.



we'd have a basement and at least three washrooms so when we took a bath we  
20 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.

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 yard, only four little  
elms the city planted by the curb. Out back is a small garage for the car we  
30 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.

Once when we were living on Loomis, a nun from my school passed by and  
saw me playing out front. The laundromat downstairs had been boarded up  
because it had been robbed two days before and the owner had painted on the  
wood YES WE'RE OPEN so as not to lose business.

Where do you live? she asked.

There, I said pointing up to the third floor.

You live *there*?

40 *There*. I had to look to where she pointed—the third floor, the paint  
peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn't fall out.  
You live *there*? The way she said it made me feel like nothing. *There*. I lived  
*there*. I nodded. **B**

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.

## My Name

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It  
means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color.  
It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is  
50 shaving, songs like sobbing. **C**

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<sup>2</sup>—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 great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild horse  
of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw  
a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy  
chandelier. That's the way he did it.

COMMON CORE L.5a

### Language Coach

**Fixed Expressions** A  
**fixed expression** offers  
a ready-made way of  
saying something.  
Reread lines 24–26.  
How does the fixed  
expression *holding their  
breath* help you “see”  
what the windows  
look like?

### **B** MAKE INFERENCES ABOUT CHARACTER

Reread lines 33–43.  
Consider the narrator's  
reaction to the nun's  
remark. What do these  
lines reveal about the  
narrator's feelings?

### **C** TONE

Reread lines 47–50.  
Identify striking words or  
phrases in this paragraph.  
What tone does Cisneros's  
**word choice** convey?  
Explain your answer.

2. **Chinese year of the horse:** In the traditional Chinese calendar, each succeeding year is named after 1 of 12 animals. People born in the year of the horse are thought to be energetic and quick-witted.



*The Cashier* (2003), Lisa Reinke. Oil on canvas, 5" × 7". © Lisa Reinke.

And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her  
60 whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if  
she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be  
all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I  
don't want to inherit her place by the window. **D**

**D AUTHOR'S  
PERSPECTIVE**

Reread lines 51–63.  
What cultural  
expectations and values  
does Cisneros reveal in  
these paragraphs?

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister's name—Magdalena—which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza.

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.

## *Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes*

I like to tell stories. I tell them inside my head. I tell them after the mailman says, Here's your mail. Here's your mail he said.

I make a story for my 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."


I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn't want to belong.

We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on 80 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.

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. **E**

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.

Friends and neighbors will say, What happened to that Esperanza? Where 90 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.  **F**

### **E AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE**

Reread lines 83–85. What might the author be saying about the power of writing? Explain your answer.

### **COMMON CORE L 5a**

### **F PARADOX**

A **paradox** is a statement that contradicts itself. Paradoxes are often like riddles, with meanings that are difficult to interpret. In line 91, when the narrator says that she has "gone away to come back," she seems to be contradicting herself. What do you think this statement means? Explain your answer.

## Comprehension

1. **Recall** Describe Esperanza’s house on Mango Street.
2. **Recall** What does Esperanza’s name mean in English?
3. **Clarify** What does Esperanza mean when she refers to her home as “the house I belong but do not belong to”?

## Text Analysis

4. **Make Inferences About Character** Review the inferences you made about Esperanza as you read. Based on your inferences, what **conclusions** can you draw about this character? List the adjectives you would use to describe Esperanza, and then explain why you chose each. Cite evidence to support your conclusions.
5. **Understand Tone** How would you describe Cisneros’s tone in these vignettes? Jot down words and phrases that stood out to you, and think about the tone they help create. Describe Cisneros’s tone in a sentence or two.
6. **Interpret Text** Reread lines 51–63 and consider Esperanza’s feelings about her legacy. She says she doesn’t want to inherit her great-grandmother’s “place by the window.” What does she mean? What else doesn’t she want to inherit? Explain your answer.
7. **Draw Conclusions** Consider Cisneros’s statement on page 613 that she strives to “write the stories that haven’t been written.” On the basis of what you know about her, why do you think Cisneros chose to tell Esperanza’s story? Explain your answer, citing evidence.
8. **Analyze Author’s Perspective** Think about the details Cisneros includes in these vignettes, as well as Esperanza’s feelings about her life. Then consider what you learned about Cisneros in the biography and background on page 613. What do you think is Cisneros’s perspective on growing up poor? Use evidence from the text as well as details from the biography to support your answer.

## Text Criticism

9. **Author’s Style** Cisneros says that in writing *The House on Mango Street* she “was trying to write something that was a cross between fiction and poetry.” In your opinion, are these vignettes more like verse or more like fiction? Consider the author’s choice of words and details as well as what she communicates with each vignette. Defend your answer with evidence from the text.

### COMMON CORE

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**RL 4** Analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone.

## What **STORIES** will you tell your children?

Is it important to share one’s life experiences with the next generation? Why?