



Literature & Character Education

The House on Mango Street

by Sandra Cisneros

Teacher Resource Guide

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Grades 6 – 8

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UNIT OVERVIEW

THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET

The Teacher Resource Guide for *The House on Mango Street* incorporates the following literacy skills and character development concepts.

Theme	Identity Awareness
Central Question	How does where you are from influence who you are?
Character Development Activities	Character Identity Wheel Personal Identity Wheel In the Characters' Shoes
Reading Comprehension Strategies	Make Connections Visualize Use Multiple Strategies
Reading & Critical Thinking Skills	Evaluate Compare & Contrast Character, Setting, Plot Draw Conclusions Author's Style Points of View Synthesis Main Idea & Supporting Details Sequence
Writing	Myself: A Thirty Word Sketch Small Group Multimedia Project Descriptive Vignette Literature Response Journal Research Project Character Monologues Final Writing Project Descriptive Prompt: Autobiographical Fiction Expository Prompt: Essay Narrative Prompt: Story Persuasive Prompt: Letter
Vocabulary & Literary Analysis	Social & Cultural Identity Awareness Terms Word Log Spanish Word Translations Vocabulary Extension Similes & Metaphors
Oral Language, Listening, & Fluency	Teacher Sharing Partner Sharing Partner Interview Whole Class Sharing Character Interview Peer Response Oral Presentation

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ABOUT VOICES LITERATURE & CHARACTER EDUCATION

The Voices Approach

Voices Literature & Character Education encourages young people to develop their own voice. These innovative materials feature award-winning multicultural literature and comprehensive Teacher Resource Guides that integrate character education, violence prevention, social and emotional learning, literacy, and writing.

Voices & Literacy

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension instruction is organized around eight strategies and fifteen skills. The National Reading Panel reported significant improvement in comprehension when students (1) receive explicit instruction in the use of specific reading strategies, and (2) are able to flexibly use multiple strategies as they read. Each guide focuses on two reading comprehension strategies, and students also are instructed in the use of multiple strategies. Reading and critical thinking skills are labeled throughout the guide at the point of use.

In each guide, students learn, practice, and apply two reading comprehension strategies that help deepen their understanding of the text. The instructional plan leads to the gradual transfer of responsibility from teacher to student through these steps:

Explain The teacher explains to students what the strategy is, when to use it, and why it helps with comprehension.

Model The teacher demonstrates how to use the strategy by thinking aloud as he/she reads a portion of the text. This is particularly effective as a tool to show students how a reader uses more than one strategy to understand a difficult part of the text.

Practice The teacher provides guided practice with students, giving feedback and support as needed. Later, students practice the strategy in pairs and small groups.

Apply Students use the new strategy as they read a new piece of text—from a textbook, a different genre, or a more difficult text.

Writing

Students use a writing process that includes prewriting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing or presenting. Writing activities encourage students to express their thoughts, opinions, and ideas across a range of writing genres and to demonstrate their understanding of the Central Question, the book, and the issues the book raises. Expository, narrative, persuasive, and descriptive prompts are included in each guide.

Vocabulary & Literary Analysis

Students expand their vocabulary by relating vocabulary words to the mood, plot, characters, and setting of the story, and by tracking unfamiliar words they encounter during reading in a Word Log. Students learn a variety of word-solving strategies to help them analyze and unlock unfamiliar words. Each guide also features vocabulary words that give students a common language for discussing the thematic social development concepts they encounter in the book.

Oral Language, Listening, & Fluency

Oral language development, or oral literacy, involves fluency in speaking and listening, and both are related to improved text comprehension. Through activities such as partner sharing, paired reading, readers' theater, oral presentation, and others, students deepen their understanding of themselves, of others, and of the text.

Voices & Character Development

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Six thematic concepts are embedded in *Voices Literature & Character Education* to help students develop self-understanding, enhance their social and emotional learning, and strengthen their understanding of democracy.

Identity Awareness Students explore who they are and how to integrate the various parts of their lives into a healthy self-concept.

Perspective Taking Students learn to express their own points of view and to take the perspectives of their peers and the characters from the literature they read.

Conflict Resolution Building on Perspective Taking, students learn ways to resolve conflicts with their peers and in society.

Social Awareness Students develop their awareness of social realities and injustices in their world.

Love & Friendship Students gain insight into the nature of their relationships with friends, family members, and neighbors.

Freedom & Democracy Students reflect and act upon their social responsibilities in a democratic society.

The Voices Instructional Plan

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Each *Voices Literature & Character Education* Teacher Resource Guide is organized around a Central Question related to the theme of the book. The following sections help develop the Central Question as they promote literacy skills and social and emotional learning.

To Connect Prereading activities introduce students to the Central Question, provide students with the social and historical context of the story, and give students the opportunity to connect their own personal experiences to the issues raised in the book.

To Read This section supports reading comprehension by introducing and revisiting the two comprehension strategies that students practice throughout reading. Students track unfamiliar words that they encounter during reading in individual Word Logs.

To Discuss Open-ended Critical Thinking Questions spark whole-class discussions that deepen students' comprehension and broaden their perspectives about social issues addressed in the text.

To Practice Individual, partner, and group activities, such as role plays, debates, and interviews, allow students to practice social skills related to the Central Question and the text.

To Express Through a variety of writing activities, students appreciate the author's style and develop their own writing skills. A final writing project enables students to express their understanding of the book and of the Central Question.

To Participate Students use their social skills as they participate in a community service learning project.

Additional teaching resources are available in the appendices of each guide. These include:

Appendix 1: Reproducibles Additional support for literacy and character development activities

Appendix 2: Additional Resources An annotated bibliography of teacher and student materials related to the book

Appendix 3: Assessment Optional multiple choice and essay tests and a theme-related observational checklist

ABOUT THE BOOK

Story Summary

In a series of interconnected, poetic vignettes, Esperanza Cordero describes the ups and downs of life on Mango Street, a downtrodden Chicago barrio. Through Esperanza's eyes, we learn what it's like to be poor, to be Mexican American, and to be a female on the threshold of womanhood. We also learn how a person can become a product of her surroundings as well as a voice for the community she holds dear. Even though Esperanza will leave Mango Street in pursuit of her dreams, she plans to come back for those "who cannot out" (p. 110).

About the Author

Like Esperanza Cordero, the protagonist of *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros grew up poor in Chicago. The only daughter among seven children in a household headed by a Mexican father and a Mexican American mother, Cisneros began writing at a young age. Scholarships enabled her to attend Loyola University in Chicago. Later, attending the prestigious University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop, Cisneros felt shy and self-conscious about her work. When her privileged classmates spoke about houses as literary symbols for the inner self, Cisneros questioned her abilities. If houses represented souls, and she was too ashamed to speak of her house, could she be a real writer? Ironically, this experience led Cisneros to write about where she came from, and eventually she realized that her poverty-stricken past had given her writing a truly distinct voice. This insight led her to begin work on *The House on Mango Street*. First published by Arte Público Press in 1984, *Mango* established Sandra Cisneros as a major figure in American literature.

Literary Analysis

Genre *The House on Mango Street* is a coming-of-age novel of autobiographical fiction that tells the story of Esperanza Cordero through a series of interwoven vignettes.

Themes of *The House on Mango Street* include individual and communal identity; cultural identity; belonging and estrangement; escape and return; coming-of-age; sexual inequality and oppression; racism; poverty; shame; and hope.

Awards & Honors

The Before Columbus Foundation
American Book Award, 1985

Sandra Cisneros Web Site

For more about Sandra Cisneros, visit
www.sandracisneros.com.

Resources

The Mexican American Family Album by Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler. Oxford University Press, 1994.

Sandra Cisneros: Latina Writer and Activist by Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg. Enslow Publishers, 1998.

Point of View *The House on Mango Street* is told in the first person voice of Esperanza Cordero, an adolescent Mexican American girl growing up in a poor Latino neighborhood in Chicago. The first-person narrative offers readers an intimate glimpse into Esperanza's family, community, inner life, triumphs, and struggles.

Author's Style Literary critics have praised the novel for its poetic style and powerful imagery. Sandra Cisneros believes the vignettes can be read in any order.

Context of the Story

Mexican Migration to the United States

Mexican immigration, or migration, can best be described as a back-and-forth process. The United States has both encouraged Mexican immigration and sent Mexican workers home, depending on the state of the U.S. economy and its labor force. In 1910 the Mexican Revolution spurred many Mexicans—from wealthy landowners and officials to military cadets to poor, common people—to flee their homeland. In the twenty years following the onset of the revolution, an estimated 700,000 Mexicans immigrated to the United States.

By the 1920s, Mexicans and Mexican Americans found jobs in automobile factories, meat plants, and other industries, but the majority of Mexican laborers planted and harvested crops. In 1924, the United States established its Border Patrol, but Mexicans continued to cross the 2,000-mile border in search of work. Those who waded across the Rio Grande were referred to as “wetbacks.” Despite the Border Patrol, little attention was paid to Mexican immigrants, who provided cheap labor to the U.S. workforce.

The scarcity of jobs in the United States during the Great Depression intensified the poverty, prejudice, and economic exploitation that Mexicans and Mexican Americans faced. Local governments began repatriation programs, sending hundreds of thousands of Mexican workers back to Mexico, regardless of their legal status.

In 1941 the United States entered World War II, giving rise to a labor shortage. In 1942 the governments of Mexico and the United States agreed on the bracero program, which encouraged Mexican laborers to enter the United States to work. This program proved so profitable to U.S. employers that it continued long after WWII ended.

Many Mexicans, including those turned down by the bracero program, continued to cross the border illegally. These workers, who did not require the same wages and benefits as braceros, were considered desirable by employers. In the mid-1950s, the government carried out Operation Wetback, sending millions of illegal Mexican immigrants back to Mexico. In 1964 the U.S. government ended the bracero program, and in 1965 it passed the Immigration and Nationality Act, limiting immigration from the Western Hemisphere to 120,000 people per year. In 1976 that number was capped at 20,000 from any one country in the Americas per year. In 1986 the Immigration Reform and Control Act offered amnesty to some illegal aliens and enacted penalties for employers who hired illegal immigrants.

Despite U.S. immigration policies, Mexicans continued to enter the United States illegally in search of work. Mexicans working in the United States can earn more than double what a comparable job in Mexico pays. Critics of U.S. immigration policy contend that the economies of both the U.S. and of Mexico depend on Mexican migration to the United States. The cheap labor Mexicans provide keeps food prices in the United States from soaring, and the Mexican economy is dependent on the money that Mexicans working in the United States send home to their families.

Chicago's Mexican American Community

Mexican immigration to Chicago follows the same ebb-and-flow pattern of the U.S. economy and labor demand. In 1916 railroads began to recruit track workers at the border. Many of these workers landed in Chicago, the hub of the nation's rail system. Mexican workers were recruited by other Chicago industries during WWI, and they were brought in to replace striking steelworkers in 1919. During the Great Depression, however, many Mexicans in Chicago were deported by the repatriation programs. The tides turned once again during WWII—15,000 Mexican railroad workers were brought to Chicago by 1945. By the 1960s, the Greyhound bus company had daily routes from Chicago to the Mexican border, enabling Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Chicago to stay in close contact with their families and homeland.

Like most Mexican immigrants, those arriving in Chicago settled in their own neighborhoods and communities, called barrios. *The House on Mango Street*, with its flair for Spanish language, its homage to Catholic holidays and rituals, its descriptive portrayal of poverty, and its close-knit neighbors, paints a picture of a typical barrio.

The Cisneros Family

Migration to the United States

Sandra Cisneros's family first migrated to the United States during the Mexican Revolution. Her paternal grandfather, a military cadet, fled to Philadelphia to avoid fighting federal troops (though he later returned to Mexico). Her maternal grandfather, whose family lived a rural life, went north to Arizona. He worked for the railroad in Flagstaff and other cities until he had saved enough money to send for his family, a typical pattern of Mexican immigration.

Sandra Cisneros's father was picked up as an illegal alien during WWII and given the choice of being deported back to Mexico or joining the United States Army. He became a U.S. citizen and joined the army. More than 300,000 Mexican Americans served in the U.S. armed forces during WWII.

By the 1940s, Sandra Cisneros's maternal grandfather, who had come north to work the railroads, settled his family in a poor Mexican neighborhood in Chicago. After WWII, Cisneros's father got off the bus in Chicago because he'd heard that a lot of Mexicans lived there. He remained in Chicago, where Sandra Cisneros was born in 1954.

ABOUT THE TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE

Overview

This guide divides *The House on Mango Street* into three readings that allow students to probe the Central Question, explore the personal identities of themselves and the characters, research their own communities, and write a series of interconnected vignettes about a character and the street he or she lives on.

Central Question

How does where you are from influence who you are?

Character Development Concept

Identity Awareness As they read and discuss *The House on Mango Street*, students deepen their understanding of identity by considering social and cultural heritage, family and family traditions, socioeconomic class, and the community they live in as integral to where they are from. By completing Identity Wheels for themselves and for Esperanza, students consider how their origins define who they are.

Reading Comprehension Strategies

This guide focuses on two reading strategies and models the use of multiple strategies. The following strategies are featured in *The House on Mango Street* Teacher Resource Guide.

Make Connections In order to construct meaning, a student makes three types of connections as he or she reads. **Text-to-Self Connections** are associations between the text and a reader's personal experiences and background knowledge. Text-to-self connections stimulate involvement with the text. A reader makes **Text-to-Text Connections** between the current story and related books. This expands a reader's background knowledge and helps readers isolate similarities and differences between the texts. A reader makes **Text-to-World Connections** between the story and real-life issues within society and the world.

Visualize The reader creates a mental picture as he or she reads in order to gain new insights and meanings from a text and to enhance overall comprehension. A mental picture may involve visual, auditory, and other sensory images related to the text.

Reading & Critical Thinking Skills

The following skills are embedded in reading, writing, and discussion activities throughout the guide: Evaluate; Compare & Contrast; Character, Setting, Plot; Draw Conclusions; Author's Style; Points of View; Synthesis; Main Idea & Supporting Details; and Sequence.

Writing

Students engage in writing activities in a variety of genres, including Literature Response Journal options and a group research project. In a final descriptive writing project, students use figurative language and sensory imagery in a series of interconnected vignettes that reflect their identity and life experiences. The guide includes alternative writing prompts for narrative, expository, and persuasive writing.

Vocabulary & Literary Analysis

A variety of activities encourage both vocabulary development and vocabulary enrichment. Students keep a Word Log in which they record vocabulary words and other unfamiliar words they encounter and engage in literary analysis to analyze the author's style. Students will work with vocabulary in relation to the mood, plot, characters, and setting of the story.

Oral Language, Listening, & Fluency

Students have numerous opportunities to develop their oral language, listening, and fluency skills through partner interviews, oral presentations, character monologues, and more.

Unit Planner for *The House on Mango Street*

Use this three-week planning guide to develop your own teaching schedule for *The House on Mango Street*. Your plan will depend on

- the length of the class period or literacy block,
- the activities you select, and
- whether students complete reading and writing assignments in class or as homework.

Unit Planner

Time Frame	Readings
Week 1	Reading 1, Pages 3–38
Week 2	Reading 2, Pages 39–73
Week 3	Reading 3, Pages 74–110

Teaching Focus

In this reading, students explore the Central Question and complete Identity Wheels for Esperanza and for themselves, focusing on how their neighborhood and community affect their identity. Small groups begin a multimedia project about their community, and students write a vignette that describes where they live.

READING 1

You live *there*? (pp. 3–38)

Overview

Esperanza Cordero has just moved to Mango Street. Her house is not exactly the house she'd dreamed of: it is old and crumbling, with "windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath" and a tiny yard dominated by a garage—never mind that her family doesn't own a car. Esperanza is a watchful and keen observer. She introduces her family by describing the differences in their hair. She describes her new acquaintances (such as Cathy, the queen of cats, who also lives on Mango Street and tells Esperanza she will be her friend "only till next Tuesday," when she and her family are slated to move) as well as landmarks such as Gil's Furniture Bought & Sold, a second-hand store. In a series of brief vignettes, she brings to life the Vargas family, headed by a single mother, Alicia, who is studying for college, and Darius, "who chases girls with firecrackers or a stick that touched a rat," all of whom are part of Esperanza's new neighborhood. Esperanza observes that "those who don't know any better" are scared to drive into her neighborhood, but those who live there are not afraid because, despite how "crooked" or "dumb" or "fat" they look to the outside world, they know each other and they know Mango Street.

To CONNECT

Central Question

How does where you are from influence who you are?

Write the Central Question on the board and facilitate a discussion about the multiple meanings of the phrase *where you are from*. For example, Where were you born? Where do you live now? Where are your parents from? Your grandparents? Have students connect the phrase *where you are from* with the place they live as well as with their familial background and cultural heritage. You may want to discuss with students the meaning of the following quote by Henry G. Cisneros, from the Introduction to *The Mexican American Family Album*:

"Children should know where they come from, so that their pride and dignity will anchor them in a world where change and modernity can disorient us."

Teacher Sharing

Describe the place where you grew up. Include in your description the physical characteristics of your community and where it was located, as well as a description of the people who lived there. You may want to describe your house and your street. What did you like about your community? What didn't you like? What is your strongest memory about growing up in your community?

Partner Sharing

Organize students into pairs. Encourage partners to tell one another about the community where they live now, or about where they used to live. What are some things that they like about their community? What are some things that they don't like? Invite students to share their community sketches with the class.

To Read

Introduction to *The House on Mango Street*

Read aloud the title of the book and the author's name. Ask

- What do you know about Sandra Cisneros?
- What do you think of the title of this book? What do you think it will be about?

Have students look through the Contents and flip through the pages of the book. Ask

- What do you notice about the chapter titles?
- What do you notice about the chapters? (*Students may note that the chapters are very short. You may want to point out that The House on Mango Street is comprised of a series of vignettes—short, descriptive literary sketches. A minilesson will provide practice with vignettes in the To Express section of this reading.*)

Geography Connection: Chicago

Tell students that *The House on Mango Street* takes place in a Latino *barrio*, the Spanish word for neighborhood, in Chicago. Challenge students to locate Chicago, Illinois, on a map of the United States, and to share with the class what they know about Chicago. You may want to share information from Mexican Migration to the United States and, in particular, Chicago's Mexican American Community from the Context of the Story section of this guide.

Vocabulary: Social & Cultural Identity Awareness

Tell students that, like Esperanza Cordero, the Mexican American protagonist of *Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros grew up in barrios in Chicago. But Cisneros also spent extended periods of time in her father's hometown of Mexico City, Mexico. For Cisneros, one of the hardest things about being Mexican American had to do with the term *Hispanic*, which refers to anyone who speaks Spanish as a first language or is related to someone who did. This term lumps together Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Spaniards, and Americans who have Spanish-speaking relatives, even though these groups have different histories and cultures. When Cisneros was growing up, her family referred to themselves as *Latino* (or *Latina* if they were female), a term referring to people from Spanish-speaking countries in North and South America. Today, Cisneros refers to herself as *Chicana* (*Chicano* for males), a word that refers specifically to Mexican Americans. Share this information with students. Ask students why they think Cisneros had difficulty with the word *Hispanic* in reference to her own identity while she was growing up. Why do they think she prefers the term *Chicana* today?

Teacher Think Alouds

A Think Aloud provides a way for teachers to model how they use a reading comprehension strategy (or multiple strategies) while reading. It is one of the best ways to make reading comprehension concrete for students.

As you read a section of text aloud to students, stop and explain to students how you are using the strategy: tell students what you are thinking, what connections you are making, the questions you ask yourself, the predictions and inferences you make, and what you visualize.

Reading Strategy: Make Connections

Tell students that good readers make connections between prior knowledge, personal experiences, and the characters, events, and setting in a novel. When we say to ourselves, "Yes, that reminds me of . . ." or "Yes, I felt just like that when . . ." we deepen our understanding of the novel. Review the different types of connections readers make (page 12). Model making connections with a Think Aloud based on a vignette that you select, such as "My Name" on page 10 of the novel. Use the example below or draw on your own experiences. Challenge students to determine which strategy you are using, Text-to-Self, Text-to-Text, or Text-to-World, and how it might help to better understand the text.

Sample Think Aloud: Text-to-Self Connections I chose the vignette "My Name" to read. I love the passage about Esperanza's great-grandmother, after whom she was named. The sentence, "She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow" (p. 11) creates such a strong image in my mind of my own mother and my grandmother, who also had unfulfilled dreams. The passage reminds me of my grandmother, who was a Russian immigrant and lived all of her adult life in a small apartment in Brooklyn. When she died, my mother displayed her small possessions on a table in the living room and

dispensed them to my sisters and me. She insisted that I take a pair of my grandmother’s brown leather gloves. When I got home, I buried the gloves in a closet. To me, they represented my grandmother’s sadness and her shame. I never wore the gloves. I did not want to inherit my grandmother’s sadness or shame, just like Esperanza doesn’t want to inherit her great-grandmother’s place by the window. This connection helps me understand how Esperanza can cherish her great-grandmother’s memory, but not want to be constrained by her fate.

Have students record personal connections in a Literature Response Journal as they read. After each reading, encourage students to share their connections with one another or with the class. Identify the type of connections, as well as how the connections help them better understand Esperanza, her neighborhood, and the conflicts and dilemmas posed by the novel.

Reading Strategy: Visualize

Introduce the reading strategy Visualize to students. Explain that readers can increase their comprehension of a text by creating mental sensory images as they read. Mental sensory images are the connections we make with our senses: what we see, hear, taste, feel (touch), and smell as we read certain passages in a text. Use “My Name” or another vignette to model this strategy with a Think Aloud. See the example below or draw from your own experience.

Sample Think Aloud: Visualize Sandra Cisneros’s words are so full of images; I want to read them over and over again. Each time, I form different images in my mind. Let’s read the first paragraph of “My Name” again. As I read, I see the letters of Esperanza’s name—E-S-P-E-R-A-N-Z-A—large, muddy, and brown. And I can hear the sadness of the songs sung in Spanish on her father’s records, like a lament, or cry, like the Mexican ballad about La Llorona, the weeping woman who is forever searching for the children she drowned in the river.

Reading Strategy: Use Multiple Strategies

Tell students that readers often use more than one reading strategy at a time. Model how they can use the strategies Make Connections and Visualize at the same time. For example, the sample Think Aloud above makes a Text-to-Self connection to the Mexican ballad about La Llorona to form a sensory (auditory) image. Emphasize that every time we visualize something from a text, we draw on a connection to something we have seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or touched.

La Llorona

For more information regarding the legend of La Llorona, you may want to refer to *La Llorona: The Weeping Woman* retold by Joe Hayes (Cinco Punto Press, 1987).

Multiple Reading Strategies

Tell students that readers often use more than one reading strategy at a time. Use a Think Aloud to model how they can use the strategies Make Connections and Visualize at the same time.

RESEARCH ORGANIZER

Directions

Esperanza is Mexican American—her family immigrated to Chicago from Mexico. In order to better understand Esperanza’s identity and where she is from, gather information about Mexican immigration to the United States. Use the following questions to guide your research. You will be asked to share with the class the information you gather.

Where was the border between the United States and Mexico before the Mexican War?
What events led up to the Mexican War?

What was the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo? What effect did this treaty have on the United States?
On Mexico? How did the treaty affect Mexicans who were living on what became United States territory?