

The House on Mango Street Book Notes

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

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Author/Context

Sandra Cisneros (1954-present)

Born in Chicago on December 20, 1954, Sandra Cisneros is the only girl in a family of seven children. Her Mexican father and Chicano mother constantly moved around from neighborhood to neighborhood, leaving Cisneros with the mixed sense of strong family ties and scattered home - themes which appear in her writing. The family's perpetual visits to Mexico gave Cisneros a center and sense of Hispanic heritage. She attended Loyola University of Chicago in the mid-seventies, graduating in 1976 with a Bachelor's Degree in English, which she soon followed up with an MFA from the acclaimed Iowa Writer's Workshop in 1978. It is from these educational experiences that Cisneros realizes that her writing is different from the 'typical' American. She uses her own experiences as an outsider, not only by race and culture, but also by gender, to create a unique voice in American literature.

Cisneros's work crosses genres, falling into the various categories of fiction, poetry, and memoir. Her first and most noted work, *The House on Mango Street* is a combination of various vignettes together creating a novella. Some see it as poetic prose, while others view it as a new canon in literature. "Though not commonly accepted by critics as "canonical", *The House on Mango Street* belongs to the entire tradition of the bildungsroman (novel of growth) or the kunstlerroman (novel inimical to growth), especially as these patterns apply to women" (Matchi 67). *The House on Mango Street* was published in 1984 and soon won a selection of prestigious awards, such as the Columbus Foundation's American Book Award in 1985, which led to fellowships and grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and teaching/lecturing positions across the country. During this time of discovery, Cisneros divided her time between California and Texas, constantly returning to her roots in Chicago.

Cisneros has written a substantial amount of material, all garnering significant praise and respect. Her first book of poetry, *My Wicked, Wicked Ways* was published in 1987, followed by a book of short stories, *Woman Hollering Creek*, published in 1991, and *Loose Woman* in 1994. It was this final collection of short fiction that guaranteed Cisneros a place amongst the American Writers of the 20th century, winning the PEN Center West Award for Best Fiction, Quality Paperback Book Club New Voices Award, Anisfield-Wolf Book Award, and the Lannan Foundation Literary Award. Cisneros's work has been highlighted and lauded by *The New York Times* and *American Library Journal*.

Cisneros continues to write and currently lectures at youth centers, community colleges, and universities around the country, just like her central character Esperanza vows to do in *The House on Mango Street*. The character of Esperanza in *The House on Mango Street* has been compared to such literary icons of Americana as Huckleberry Finn. "It may seem that the two boy's books are really journeys, while Mango Street is limited to a house, and therefore set - the opposite of a geographical quest. But when one looks at the patterns of the novels, what the boys go out to see simply comes past Esperanza, so that the effect is the same" (Matchi 66).



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Plot Summary

Esperanza Cordero recollects her life living on Mango Street and all the people she meets while there. Although her family has not always lived there, it is perhaps the most important place she has lived, for it represents her heritage and upbringing. In small vignettes, Esperanza tells the tales of all the people and experiences she has with her little sister, Nenny. She meets Cathy, a wealthier girl who makes Esperanza feel negatively about her home and moves away when the neighborhood gets bad. She meets Sally, a girl with painted makeup like the Egyptian Queens, who comes from a strict religious family who beats her. Sally later becomes a loose woman, lies to Esperanza, and moves away to get married before the end of eighth grade. Esperanza and Nenny become friends with two sisters named Lucy and Rachel (from Texas), with whom they ride bikes and have many adventures. Esperanza is also friends with a girl named Alicia, who is terrified of the rats in her apartment, and later shares her poetry with Esperanza.

Esperanza also discovers boys through several women and men who live on the street. Marin, the girlfriend of Louie, tells her about makeup and nylons, before she is sent away because of bad behavior. Elenita, the fortune teller, informs Esperanza that she desires a large house and has many wishes to fulfill. Rafaela and Ruthie passively instruct Esperanza on how not to marry too young, while her own mother expresses her deep wishes and desires for her to live a better life.

As Esperanza meets people, tries to fit in, feels like an ugly duckling, and craves the touch of a man, she realizes that the neighborhood she hates and the house of which she is ashamed is not terrible. After the three sisters advise her to remember her family and remember where she came from, Esperanza realizes that she will leave Mango Street. However, despite the impending travels and stories she will create and tell, Mango Street will never leave her.



Major Characters

Esperanza Cordero : Esperanza Cordero is a young Hispanic girl living on Mango Street with her large family. She is embarrassed by her family's current home and constantly wishes to have a new house of her own, far away from the slums of Mango Street. As she grows up, she meets various people indicative of her neighborhood and influential in her growth. She feels like an ugly duckling, loves to write, and wants to protect those who she loves. Esperanza loves to write down all her stories and realizes that even if she escapes to a better life, she must always remember her youth, her upbringing, and the place from which she came: Mango Street.

Nenny: Nenny is Esperanza's little sister and constant companion. Short for Magdalena, Nenny accompanies her sister on her various escapades and experiences on Mango Street, meeting new people and learning new things.

Rachel: Rachel is Lucy's little sister, and has difficulty pronouncing English phrases. She accompanies Nenny and Esperanza through many of their youthful ventures before Esperanza grows up and spends her time with Sally.

Lucy: Lucy is Rachel's older sister and friend of Esperanza. They meet when trying to buy an old bicycle. Lucy, Rachel, Esperanza, and Nenny go on many adventures early on, before they grow up and discover other interests, such as boys and escapes. She claims to come from Texas.

Mama: Mama is Esperanza's mother and a woman of many dreams and wishes for her children. She speaks two languages, can sing opera, and once had greater dreams for herself than simply cooking for other people. She hopes that Esperanza will fulfill all her aspirations.

Papa: Papa is Esperanza's father and the head of the Cordero household. He awakens Esperanza one night in tears over the death of his own father, and constantly wonders why Esperanza wants to escape so much.

Sally: Sally is a beautiful girl in Esperanza's class who comes from a strict religious family. In rebellion, Sally dresses provocatively and paints her eyes like Egypt, earning a foul and risqué reputation. Esperanza befriends Sally, only to be raped because of her loose mentality and uncaring attitude. She gets married before the end of eighth grade and moves away.

Minor Characters

Cathy: Cathy is a wealthier girl who lives on Mango Street before it gets bad and dangerous. She claims to be a cousin of French royalty and owns a multitude of cats. She moves away soon after meeting Esperanza to a better, more affluent neighborhood.



Kiki: Kiki is one of Esperanza's little brothers. He has hair like fur and plays pretty much only with his brother Carlos.

Carlos: Carlos is another of Esperanza's little brothers. His hair is thick and straight and is the best friend of his brother, Kiki.

Great-grandmother Esperanza: Esperanza is named after her wild great-grandmother, who was tamed after marriage. Esperanza never wants to regret her life and decisions like her namesake, and secretly wishes to change her name.

Meme Ortiz: Meme Ortiz moves into Cathy's house after her family leaves. His given name is Juan, but everyone calls him Meme (except his mother). He plays with Esperanza in the trees.

Louie: Louie's family rents the basement of Meme Ortiz's house. He hails from Puerto Rico, where the rest of his family currently lives, and spends time with his cousins, one of whom steals cars.

Marin: Marin is one of Esperanza's early friends and the female cousin of neighbor Louie. She is one of Esperanza's early mentors who is sent away because of her bad and risqué behavior with men and cigarettes. She hails from Puerto Rico and speaks of her boyfriend still living there, and also instructs Esperanza on how to attract men.

Alicia: Alicia is a friend of Esperanza's who is constantly afraid of the mice in her kitchen. She is from Guadalajara and tells Esperanza that she must always remember that her home is Mango Street.

Darius: Darius is one of Esperanza's schoolmates who loves to look up into the sky and dream about the clouds.

Aunt Lupe: Aunt Lupe was a beautiful swimmer one day until she became extremely ill and paralyzed. Esperanza and her friends tease Aunt Lupe one day in front of her, causing their mother to call them evil children.

Elenita: Elenita is the Tarot Card reader who forecasts Esperanza's future. She lives in a fairly nice home and takes care of her infant baby.

Geraldo: Geraldo is a boy with whom Marin danced one evening at a nightclub. He is killed that night and nobody knows who he is, his last name, or anything about him.

Ruthie: Ruthie is Edna's daughter and a tall, attractive would-be dancer. She lives with Edna, despite rumors that she has a husband and a house elsewhere.

Edna: Edna owns the building on Mango Street next to the Corderos. She goes through tenants quickly and gets frustrated with all their actions. Edna does have at least one daughter, Ruthie, who stays with her for a long while.



Earl: Earl lives in Edna's building and is a jukebox repairman from Tennessee. Although he befriends Esperanza and her friends with his music, he brings different women home constantly.

Sire: Sire is a tough guy in the neighborhood who plays with his girl, Lois. Esperanza looks at him like a man she wants to be wrapped around.

Mamacita: Mamacita is an obese Mexican woman who was brought to the neighborhood by her son. She speaks no English and cries constantly about returning home to her country.

Rafaela: Rafaela is a beautiful woman entrapped in a bad marriage. She waits alone all day, looking outside the window. And on Tuesdays, she drops money down to Esperanza and her friends to buy her some Coconut and Papaya Juice.

Minerva: Minerva is a neighbor of Esperanza and only a few years older. She has suffered a difficult life, marrying a man who left her beaten and with two children.

The Three Sisters: The three sisters are the elderly aunts of Rachel and Lucy who visit only once during the funeral of their baby sister. They advise Esperanza to remember her roots and stay true to her family's heritage.



Objects/Places

Mango Street: Although it is not the only place Esperanza Cordero has lived, it is the most important in her cultural heritage. Mango Street is not in a good neighborhood, and Esperanza's house is a broken down old shack in which she is ashamed to live. However, through all the people she meets living on Mango Street, she realizes that she must always return to it in order to remember who she is and from where she comes.

Pan Photo Finishers: Pan Photo Finishers is the photo lab in which Esperanza finds her first job. She must simply correlate the photos with the negatives. One day during her lunch hour, she hides in the closet and finds an older Oriental man who tries to kiss her.

The Canteen: The canteen is the lunchroom at school in which many boys and girls eat when they live too far to go home for lunch. Esperanza desperately wants to be a part of the canteen and begs her mother to write her a note and make her a sack lunch so that she may join the rest of the children. However, when her mother finally complies, the nuns at school claim that she lives too close to eat in the canteen and make a mockery of her attempts. She spends her one lunch hour in the canteen crying.

The Monkey Garden: The Monkey Garden is located on Mango Street and seems one place where Esperanza can hide and play and just be herself. However, when she plays with Sally in it, the boys taunt and tease them. When Esperanza tries to save Sally from the boys, she is raped.

Gil's Furniture Bought and Sold: Gil's Furniture store is a vintage store that Esperanza and Nenny visit during their youth.



Quotes

Quote 1: "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." Chapter 1, pg. 5

Quote 2: "And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her 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." Chapter 4, pg. 11

Quote 3: "Marin, under the streetlight, dancing by herself, is singing the same song somewhere. I know. Is waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life." Chapter 11, pg. 27

Quote 4: "All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes." Chapter 12, pg. 28

Quote 5: "They bloom like roses, I continue because it's obvious I'm the only one who can speak with any authority; I have science on my side. The bones just open. Just like that. One day you might decide to have kids, and then where are you going to put them? Got to have room. Bones got to give." Chapter 20, pg. 50

Quote 6: "Most likely I will go to hell and most likely I deserve to be there. My mother says I was born on an evil day and prays for me. Lucy and Rachel pray too. For ourselves and for each other...because of what we did to Aunt Lupe." Chapter 23, pg. 58

Quote 7: "They never saw the kitchenettes. They never knew about the two-room flats and sleeping rooms he rented, the weekly money orders sent home, the currency exchange. How could they? His name was Geraldo. And his home is in another country. The ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo - he went north...we never heard from him again." Chapter 25, pg. 66

Quote 8: "Everything is holding its breath inside me. Everything is waiting to explode like Christmas. I want to be all new and shiny. I want to sit out bad at night, a boy around my neck and the wind under my skirt. Not this way, every evening talking to the trees, leaning out my window, imagining what I can't see." Chapter 28, pg. 73

Quote 9: "Their strength is secret. They send ferocious roots beneath the ground. They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth between their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth and never quit their anger. This is how they keep." Chapter 29, pg. 74



Quote 10: "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." Chapter 34, pg. 86-87

Quote 11: "I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate." Chapter 35, pg. 89

Quote 12: "I looked at my feet in their white socks and ugly round shoes. They seemed far away. They didn't seem to be my feet anymore. And the garden that had been such a good place to play didn't seem mine either." Chapter 38, pg. 98

Quote 13: "When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are...Then I didn't know what to say. It was as if she could read my mind, as if she knew what I had wished for, and I felt ashamed for having made such a selfish wish." Chapter 41, pg. 105

Quote 14: "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. 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." Chapter 44, pg. 110



Topic Tracking: Family

Family 1: Esperanza opens her stories with a description of her family. They are the most important people in her life, despite her frustrations and embarrassment, and will always be with her, long after her exodus from Mango Street.

Family 2: Esperanza describes the hair of each member of her family in youthful detail. Although they are all related, their hair is distinct. Esperanza believes she has messy and unruly hair, indicative of her personality.

Family 3: Esperanza is named after her great-grandmother, keeping the "hope" in her family alive. Her namesake was a wild and passionate woman, until she was carried away to be married somewhat against her will.

Family 4: Esperanza and Nenny do not look like sisters, or family even. However, the one conjoining piece of familial resemblance is their laugh. Their loud cackle is the same, and it makes Esperanza realize that they come from the same blood, the same family.

Family 5: Esperanza and her enormous, extended family celebrate the first communion of one of her distant cousins. They all gather together in celebration, dancing, eating, and talking. Times such as these, in which the entire family comes together, are a vital component to Esperanza's upbringing, whether she likes them or not.

Family 6: Esperanza sees her father cry over the death of his own father and feels close to her family. The bonds of family are what tie her with so many people of her past, and will tie her with people she meets in the future. She sees how human her father is when he sobs over his own papa.

Family 7: Esperanza teases her Aunt Lupe for her disease and inability to walk. When she does this, she feels guilty. Esperanza realizes that family is important, despite illness and injury, and that one should never mistreat another person - especially a member of the family.

Family 8: Ruthie is Edna's daughter, and by the bonds of family and blood, cannot be separated. Edna, therefore, cannot throw her daughter on the street homeless, like she does to other tenants. She must allow her to stay in her building as long as she likes, for family must always help family.

Family 9: Sally is constantly beaten by her own father, her family. He worries that she will turn out to be a loose woman, like his sisters and beats her whenever she is talking to a boy. Esperanza wants to help her, but realizes that there is nothing she can do. Sally was born into her family and can only escape it if she does so herself.

Family 10: Sally finds a family of her own by marrying a man and moving far away. This new family does not treat her much better than her previous one, for she is not allowed

to use the phone or even look out the window. Sally's vicious cycle of family mistreatment continues on, with new people coming and going.



Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams

Hopes and Dreams 1: Esperanza's central hope throughout the vignettes is to have a large, real, comfortable house; one that she is not ashamed to own, one in which she has complete control of her destiny. After she describes this house on Mango Street, Esperanza realizes that having her own house is her greatest dream.

Hopes and Dreams 2: Alicia is actively trying to achieve her dreams and goals. She attends the university so that she may have a better life. However, the dream is not fully realized as yet, for she still must live at home and be afraid of the mice in the kitchen.

Hopes and Dreams 3: Although Darius seems initially to be a rough kid who likes to taunt everyone, he truly has the same hopes and dreams as Esperanza. He expresses his dreams by looking up at the clouds. He believes he sees God in the sky and continues to look up, so that he may feel happy and at peace. Whether he realizes what he dreams are or not, he sees them in the clouds.

Hopes and Dreams 4: Esperanza hopes to eat in the canteen at school with the other girls and boys who live far from home. She wants this so desperately that she convinces her mother to write a faux note to the nuns. However, when she gets her wish, she realizes that it isn't all that great. She cries through the lunch hour and never gets to return.

Hopes and Dreams 5: When Esperanza visits Elenita to have her fortune told, she hopes to have a house one day. Elenita sees the dreaming in Esperanza's eyes and informs her of a large house one day.

Hopes and Dreams 6: Ruthie sits around in Edna's building reminiscing of her past dreams. She used to think she could be a song and dance girl. Now, those dreams are out the window, along with her marriage.

Hopes and Dreams 7: Sally comes from a family with no hopes and dreams and Esperanza wonders if she ever wants to escape. If Esperanza were in Sally's family, would hope to escape to another world. Esperanza secretly hopes to become friends with Sally, for she seems so interesting and pretty.

Hopes and Dreams 8: Esperanza hopes to have a large house on a hill one day, in which she can keep bums in the attic, instead of rats and mice. That way, she can tell people who wonder what the noise is, that she is housing bums. These dreams are to help other people, and not just herself, separating her wishes from those of others.

Hopes and Dreams 9: Esperanza's mama is a smart cookie with much talent. However, she never used it to better her own life. She desperately wishes a better life for her daughter and tells her so.



Hopes and Dreams 10: The three sisters tell Esperanza to make a wish. She does not reveal her wish, but they realize that she hopes to move away from Mango Street and find her own life - a better life. They instruct her to always remember Mango Street and the world from which she came.

Hopes and Dreams 11: Esperanza realizes that she is Mango Street and it is part of her. She longs to travel and find a new home of her own; however, she will always return to help those who could not achieve their dreams. She will always return.



Topic Tracking: Sexuality

Sexuality 1: Marin is one of Esperanza's first female friends of impression. She sells makeup for Avon and is the girlfriend of neighbor Louie. However, Marin holds the reputation of a bad girl, because of her loose sexuality and cigarettes. At this point, however, Esperanza still looks up to her, despite her company of men.

Sexuality 2: A small change such as high-heeled women's shoes can transform a little girl into a vibrant young woman that reeks of sexuality and sensuality. When Esperanza and her friends walk around in the shoes, their legs are elongated like a woman's and men taunt them. Men make comments and try to kiss them, all because of their blooming sexuality evident by the shoes.

Sexuality 3: When the girls discover their new hips, they become so excited, for they realize that they are now women - women who can give birth. The women they are becoming are women who can attract men and eventually become involved in sensual activities.

Sexuality 4: When Esperanza goes to her first job, she is thrown into a new world. She escapes in the coatroom and finds a man who simply wants her for sexual reasons. He tries to kiss her and does not let go. This is one of Esperanza's first uncomfortable experiences with romance and sexuality.

Sexuality 5: Esperanza looks to Sire and his girlfriend Lois with awe. She longs to be held and touched as a woman, the same way Sire touches Lois. She realizes she is growing up and is ready to enter womanhood. However, her mother warns her not to turn out like the type of girl that Lois is.

Sexuality 6: When Esperanza sees Sally agreeing to kiss all the boys, she runs to get help. And when nobody will help her, the other boys taunt her and then have their way with her. This introduction to her own sexuality is not what she had always dreamed about. While Sally seems to like the sexual attention, Esperanza feels uncomfortable and ugly with it.

Sexuality 7: Esperanza is hurt, angry, and frustrated. Her visions of sex come from books and movies, and her first experience was vicious and invasive. She equates the laughing boys with the red clowns at the carnival.



Chapter 1 - The House on Mango Street

Esperanza Cordero opens the novel with a short description of her family's constant movement. They have moved houses so many times she cannot remember, although she remembers the houses on Loomis, Keeler, and Paulina. And although the current house on Mango Street isn't the dream house her parents dreamed of each night, with running water, three washrooms, stairs, a basement, and a great lawn, it is still their own. She shares a room with her little sister Nenny, while her brothers Kiki and Carlos share another, and her Mama and Papa share the third.

Topic Tracking: Family 1

Esperanza recalls an instance during her family's short residence on the third floor of a run-down building on Loomis Street. There had been a robbery in the Laundromat downstairs and the owners wrote that there were still open on the boarded windows as to not lose business. A passing nun questioned Esperanza about whether she lived *there*, as if it were something to be ashamed of. "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." Chapter 1, pg. 5

Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams 1



Chapter 2 - Hairs

Esperanza ponders the hair of all the members in her family, with the fondest sensory recall of her mother's hair. Her Papa's is like a broom, Carlos's thick and straight, Nenny's is slippery, Kiki's is like fur, her own is lazy, while her mother's is like candy circles and smells like fresh bread. She loves the way it curls after being pinned in curlers all day long. Her mother's hair comforts Esperanza, just like the rest of the memories of her family: her father's snoring, the rain outside, and her mother's fresh-smelling, artificially curled hair.

Topic Tracking: Family 2

Chapter 3 - Boys and Girls

Esperanza wishes for a best girl friend of her own, as she realizes the differences between boys and girls. She looks at her own family as references. Carlos and Kiki are each other's best friend, and truly no friend to Esperanza and Nenny. Her sister, Nenny, however, is too young to be her friend, and must therefore be her responsibility. Esperanza longs for her own best friend, to whom she can tell all the secrets in the world. Until that time, she feels like a red balloon tied to its anchor below.



Chapter 4 - My Name

Esperanza ponders the meaning and pronunciation of her name, which means "hope" in its English translation from Spanish. She is named after her great-grandmother, who was also born during the Chinese Year of the Horse. Although she never met her, she would have loved to get to know the wild woman who was her namesake, who never wanted to marry or be tamed, until her grandfather carried her off as his object.

"And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her 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." Chapter 4, pg. 11

Topic Tracking: Family 3

Esperanza does not like the way people pronounce her beautiful Spanish name at school and likes to keep it whole - without a nickname - like her sister Magdalena (Nenny). She secretly wants to baptize herself under a new name more suited to her private personality, for she does not like the mumbled English sounding name of Esperanza.



Chapter 5 - Cathy Queen of Cats

Esperanza describes Cathy, a girl who believes she is the great great grand cousin of the queen of France, and a girl whose pompous air makes Esperanza feel badly about herself. Cathy owns a menagerie of cats and informs Esperanza about all the people of the neighborhood before she moves away next Tuesday, because the neighborhood is getting bad. Esperanza feels like she is moving farther north on Mango Street because of people like her own family moving in.



Chapter 6 - Our Good Day

Two girls named Rachel and Lucy ask Cathy and Esperanza for five dollars so that they can buy a bike from some kid named Tito. Cathy tells Esperanza not to talk to such people; yet, Esperanza goes inside to find the money. She has three dollars and takes two from Nenny. When she returns, Cathy is gone, and Esperanza is free to make these two new friends. Rachel is Lucy's little sister, and speaking in broken English, they claim to come from Texas. Together, they ride their new bike up and down Mango Street making comments at the local storeowners, feeling like sassy, outgoing, strong girls.



Chapter 7 - Laughter

Esperanza doesn't think that she and Nenny look like sisters, as opposed to the obvious similarities between Lucy and Rachel (with their lips). However, they laugh in the same loud, cackling, boisterous, sudden outburst of happiness. One day, Esperanza spies a house that looks like Mexico. Before Rachel and Lucy can laugh, Nenny agrees that the house does, in fact, look like Mexico.

Topic Tracking: Family 4

Chapter 8 - Gil's Furniture Bought & Sold

Nenny and Esperanza visit the local vintage store, used pawnshop, called Gil's Furniture Bought & Sold. They goggle at the dozens of broken-down appliances and dim lights. The owner is a black man who doesn't speak much, unless a customer wants to buy something. Nenny inquires about a music box, which the owner describes as much more beautiful and useful than it actually is, until she wants to buy it. He claims that it is not for sale.



Chapter 9 - Meme Ortiz

Meme Ortiz moves into Cathy's old house after her family leaves. His actual name is Juan, and he is constantly followed by his sheepdog, with one name in English and one in Spanish, large and clumsy, and imitable of its owner. Cathy's father had built the house, so it has slanted stairs, floors, and rooms. There are no closets and the front stairs are crooked. The backyard houses many things, including a large tree, which Juan and Esperanza use for several games. Juan breaks both his arms jumping out of the tree and winning their First Annual Tarzan Jumping Contest.



Chapter 10 - Louie, His Cousin, & His Other Cousin

Meme's basement has an apartment that his mother fixes to rent out to Louie's family, a broken family from Puerto Rica. Louie is the oldest of a family of all girls, and is therefore, basically Esperanza's brother's friend. The rest of the family still lives in Puerto Rico. Louie spends time with Marin, one cousin who sells make-up from Avon and another cousin, who has stolen a car. Esperanza and the rest of the children do not realize that this breathtaking yellow Cadillac is stolen property, and all go for a ride in it one day. The police chase it down a small alleyway until the car bumps into the wall and he is arrested.

Chapter 11 - Marin

Esperanza recollects her fond memories of her friend, Marin from Puerto Rico. Marin teaches Esperanza all about boys and working and the world, informing her of her boyfriend still waiting to marry her in Puerto Rico, how she wants to work downtown and wear pretty clothes and marry someone wealthy who she meets in the subway, and how to attract men with her strong gaze. Esperanza is sad because Marin's parents plan to send her back to her mother because they believe she is too much trouble, with her cigarettes and her men. "Marin, under the streetlight, dancing by herself, is singing the same song somewhere. I know. Is waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life" Chapter 11, pg. 27.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 1

Chapter 12 - Those Who Don't

Esperanza ponders her neighborhood and wonders why other people of different colors are frightened when they enter it. She knows each person and realizes that she is safe and won't get knifed. Those people who don't know where they are, are in her neighborhood because they are lost.

"All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive into a neighborhood of another color and our knees go shakity-shake and our car windows get rolled up tight and our eyes look straight. Yeah. That is how it goes and goes." Chapter 12, pg. 28



Chapter 13 - There Was an Old Woman...

Rosa Vargas is a woman in Esperanza's neighborhood who cannot control her large litter of children alone. She was left by her no-good husband without any money for the children and can do nothing to stop them from misbehaving and causing injury and harm to other living beings, inanimate objects, and themselves. One of the children even jumped off a high roof of a house to his death. She gave up trying to parent and control them long ago.



Chapter 14 - Alicia Who Sees Mice

Alicia is a friend of Esperanza's who is trying to better her life by attending the university. However, because her mother passed away, she is the woman of the house and must run after and kill the mice that are constantly populating the kitchen. Her father tells her that they don't exist or that they'll just go away; however, she never listens to him.

Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams 2



Chapter 15 - Darius & The Clouds

Darius is a schoolmate of Esperanza's who hates classes, is a perpetual tease and pest to others, taunts girls, and causes trouble. However, when he looks up at the sky and sees nothing but beautiful clouds, he is at peace. He believes there can never be enough flowers and butterflies, and even believes that God exists in one of the bounteous white puffs in the sky above.

Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams 3

Chapter 16 - And Some More

Rachel, Lucy, Esperanza, and Nenny sit around looking up at the clouds. Esperanza adds that the Eskimos have thirty different names for snow, while Rachel claims to have a cousin with three different names. They bicker on the necessity and validity of both statements and proceed to name the clouds above. They initially call them all Cumulus and proceed to recite a long list of various American and Hispanic names. Rachel and Lucy insult Esperanza by calling her face ugly and puffy like the clouds. The two groups of sisters erupt in a battle of insults, culminating in Esperanza scolding Nenny never to speak to the stupid Lucy and Rachel again.



Chapter 17 - The Family of Little Feet

A family in Esperanza's neighborhood is known for its tiny feet. Everyone in it has small feet, either stuffed inside shoes, baby mouths, or powdered into heels. The mother gives Rachel and Esperanza some high-heeled pumps - lemon and pale blue - that they wear around town. They love the way the shoes make them feel and look (like real long women's legs), and they openly welcome all macho comments. However, when a dirty bum on the street tries to give Rachel a dollar for a kiss, the girls run away and never wear the shoes again. Lucy hides them in her room until their mother throws them away.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 2

Chapter 18 - A Rice Sandwich

Esperanza desperately wants to eat in the canteen, the lunchroom at school, with the other boys and girls who do not go home for lunch break. She begs her mama for three straight days to make her a bag lunch and give her a note to give the nuns that allows her to eat with the others. If she does this, then she will be gone more and think her mother will appreciate her more upon return at the end of the day. When Esperanza goes to school the next day, she presents the note to the nuns who beckon her upstairs to point out her house. She lives close enough to go home for lunch. Nonetheless, Esperanza begins to cry and is allowed to eat in the canteen just this one day. By the time she eats, her rice sandwich (made because the family had no meat) is all cold and greasy, and the canteen is not as exciting as she had imagined in the first place.

Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams 4



Chapter 19 - Chanclas

One of Esperanza's cousins has his first communion, so her large family celebrates by dressing up and dancing. Her mama initially forgets Esperanza's church shoes and later falls ill from possibly eating too many tamales. In the middle of the party, Uncle Nacho pulls Esperanza to the dance floor. The two dance and create quite a show for the rest of the partygoers.

Topic Tracking: Family 5



Chapter 20 - Hips

Rachel, Lucy, and Nenny discuss their impending development of hips, while Esperanza comments on her current burgeoning body. They are thrilled at the prospect of owning such powerful body parts and terrified at the same time of not getting them. They realize that hips are a distinguishing physicality between men and women and allow for childbirth. They laugh and joke and make up verses to songs and poems and chants about women and body parts. Nenny is the only one who doesn't seem to understand their foul humor.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 3

"They bloom like roses, I continue because it's obvious I'm the only one who can speak with any authority; I have science on my side. The bones just open. Just like that. One day you might decide to have kids, and then where are you going to put them? Got to have room. Bones got to give." Chapter 20, pg. 50



Chapter 21 - The First Job

Esperanza must earn money so that she could continue attending the Catholic school, for she realizes that her papa is right - nobody attends public school who wants to turn out right. She secures a social security card and, as per her mother's orders, tells the people in Pan Photo Finishers that she is one year older than her true age. She is uncomfortable, but simply must match the negatives with the prints. At lunch, she feels alone and secluded and waits in the coatroom for the shift to begin again. An oriental man enters and tells her that she is pretty and that he simply wants a birthday kiss. Nervously, Esperanza sees no harm, so she leans in to peck his cheek and he grabs her face and kisses her mouth without letting go.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 4



Chapter 22 - Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark

Esperanza's father wakes her up in the middle of the night to inform her of his father's death. Papa proceeds to cry hysterically, shocking Esperanza at such a novel sight. As the oldest child, it is her responsibility to tell the other children of the tragedy and of the proper mourning behavior. Esperanza sees her father sitting in the dark on her bed and holds him, terrified of knowing the feeling of losing him.

Topic Tracking: Family 6



Chapter 23 - Born Bad

"Most likely I will go to hell and most likely I deserve to be there. My mother says I was born on an evil day and prays for me. Lucy and Rachel pray too. For ourselves and for each other...because of what we did to Aunt Lupe." Chapter 23, pg. 58

Esperanza recalls her Aunt Guadalupe, a beautiful woman who loved to swim. In a tragic accident, Aunt Lupe broke her spine and developed a hideous disease, became blind and useless. Esperanza realizes that disease pick just anyone, regardless of worship and race and honesty. One day, Esperanza plays with her friends by imitating various famous people. They randomly select her Aunt Lupe and made fun of her inability to cook, clean, iron, speak, and read. She overhears everything and feels pathetic and miserable. Mama never forgives Esperanza for doing such a horrible deed, for soon afterwards, Aunt Lupe passes away. The same Aunt Lupe who had always listened to Esperanza's poetry and encouraged her to continue writing.

Topic Tracking: Family 7



Chapter 24 - Elenita, Card, Palm, Water

Esperanza visits the card reader, Elenita, for a forecast of her future. Elenita's apartment contains a large screen color television and lots of red furry furniture covered in plastic, on account of her infant baby. She reads Esperanza's cards, which do not make much sense at first. She claims that she feels the spirits strongly around Esperanza's presence, that there are signs of sorrow and jealousy, and also much luxury. She will attend a wedding soon. Esperanza wonders what she can do about such a prediction and Elenita gives her a list of possible solutions and amenities, all that involve bizarre spells and potions. As Esperanza prepares to leave, Elenita claims that her house is full of heart and that she will light a candle for her that she will have a new house full of heart. She blesses her.

Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams 5



Chapter 25 - Geraldo No Last Name

Esperanza recalls Marin's night out on the town when she met and danced with a man named Geraldo. She never got his last name or knew a thing about him. When he was killed that night, she visited the hospital and was questioned by the police; but unfortunately could give them no information. He was nothing to her except a boy she just met. However, he was something to other people. A boy from Mexico who spoke no English:

"They never saw the kitchenettes. They never knew about the two-room flats and sleeping rooms he rented, the weekly money orders sent home, the currency exchange. How could they? His name was Geraldo. And his home is in another country. The ones he left behind are far away, will wonder, shrug, remember. Geraldo - he went north...we never heard from him again." Chapter 25, pg. 66

Chapter 26 - Edna's Ruthie

Edna owns the building on Mango Street next to the Cordero's home. She constantly throws out her tenants, due to frustration, animals, booz, or other problems. However, when Ruthie arrives, she is suddenly taken aback, for she cannot throw out her own daughter. Ruthie is a tall, slender, attractive, made-up woman who claims to have a house and husband of her own, could have been a song-and-dance girl, and loves to play with Esperanza and her friends. She loves listening to Esperanza read, but claims that she is always too tired to read herself, and comments that she thinks Esperanza has the most beautiful teeth ever created.

Topic Tracking: Family 8

Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams 6



Chapter 27 - The Earl of Tennessee

Earl is one of Edna's tenants next door on Mango Street. He is a jukebox repairman from the south, who always smokes a cigar, wears a felt hat, and loves to play his records all day long. He even gives them to Esperanza and her friends, save the Country Western albums. Edna and everyone else believe that he has a wife somewhere. Sometimes she is skinny and blonde and other times she is tall and redheaded. Whenever he brings a mysterious woman inside with him, he clutches her by the forearm and leads her inside for a brief visit.



Chapter 28 - Sire

Sire is a beautiful boy in Esperanza's neighborhood Mango Street who had a girlfriend named Lois, with whom he spends all his time. Esperanza is not frightened of Sire and his older gang friends. When he looks at Esperanza, she gets excited, instead of scared, as her mama warns her to be. She sees Lois as a beautiful, painted woman who doesn't know how to tie her own shoes, like Esperanza does. Her mother warns her not to spend time with such a girl, for she doesn't want to turn out like that. However, Esperanza wants to be held tightly by a boy and wonders what it feels like with Sire.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 5

"Everything is holding its breath inside me. Everything is waiting to explode like Christmas. I want to be all new and shiny. I want to sit out bad at night, a boy around my neck and the wind under my skirt. Not this way, every evening talking to the trees, leaning out my window, imagining what I can't see." Chapter 28, pg. 73



Chapter 29 - Four Skinny Trees

Esperanza feels a kindred spirit with the four skinny trees beside her house. They are tall, thin, and have pointy elbows, just like her. They do not belong where they are planted, but continue to strive nonetheless. "Their strength is secret. They send ferocious roots beneath the ground. They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth between their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth and never quit their anger. This is how they keep" Chapter 29, pg. 74. They must work together to grow, and they continue to do so together. Their presence keeps Esperanza going.



Chapter 30 - No Speak English

Across the street from Esperanza lives a man who worked very hard to bring his mother to the United States from Mexico. They call her Mamacita and she stays inside constantly. When she first arrives, Esperanza sees her fat body exit the taxicab in beautiful pink shoes. She speaks no English and cries constantly to return home. Her son repeatedly fights with her, informing her that they are now home and living in America. She must learn to speak English. She does not want to.



Chapter 31 - Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut...

Rafaela lives on Mango Street and is stuck in a strict marriage. She is constantly leaning out of the window, waiting for her husband to return. However, he will not allow her to leave the apartment because he fears her beauty will cause problems. She often throws money down to Esperanza, Nenny, and their friends on Tuesdays, so that they would run to the store and buy her Coconut or Papaya Juice to drink. They send it up to her on string, while she wishes she were drinking a sweeter drink in a sweeter place.



Chapter 32 - Sally

Sally is in school with Esperanza. She paints her beautiful eyes like Cleopatra and wears smoky nylons, garnering too much negative attention from both boys and girls. Everyone taunts her and she stands alone at the fence at recess without a best friend. Esperanza looks at this girl like she is a beautiful doll and one, which she strives to be like. However, Sally comes from a strict religious family that does not allow her to go out dancing or to parties. She runs home straight after school, changes her provocative attire and removes all her makeup. Esperanza wonders if Sally wants to escape and live far away from Mango Street, where there are no rules and no mocking, and just someone to love her unconditionally.

Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams 7

Chapter 33 - Minerva Writes Poems

Minerva is only a few years older than Esperanza, but lives in an entirely different world. Her husband beats her, gives her two children, and leaves her. Each time he returns, they fight, scream, hit, and he leaves again. Consequently, she believes her bad luck is permanent and cries all the time. She and Esperanza share their poetry with one another.



Chapter 34 - Bums in the Attic

When her family goes to the hills on Sundays, Esperanza never wants to go. Her papa teases her for being stuck-up and thinking herself too old to go on such family outings. Esperanza really thinks that the people who live in those houses are stuck-up and don't have to worry about anything but garbage. She hopes to live in a big house on a hill one day and keep bums in her attic, instead of rats.

Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams 8

"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." Chapter 34, pg. 86-87



Chapter 35 - Beautiful & Cruel

Esperanza thinks about the good women and bad women and thinks she is cruel. She does not want to sit around and wait to get married who have no hopes or choices. She thinks herself ugly, and therefore a woman with few options. "I have begun my own quiet war. Simple. Sure. I am one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate" Chapter 35, pg. 89.

Chapter 36 - A Smart Cookie

Esperanza's mama constantly lectures her daughter on the importance of using a brain to break out of the cycle in which she is caught. She is smart: she speaks two languages, sings opera, and can do just about anything except take the subway. She doesn't want her daughter to wind up cooking all day like her. She wants her to be more.

Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams 9



Chapter 37 - What Sally Said

Sally comes to school constantly bruised, saying that she fell. She eventually tells Esperanza the truth, that her father beats her constantly, worrying that she will run away like his sisters to become whores. Sally stays with Esperanza's family briefly until her father comes crying to beg her to return home. She leaves with him; however, any time he sees her speaking with a boy, she is absent from school the following day.

Topic Tracking: Family 9



Chapter 38 - The Monkey Garden

The Monkey Garden is near Esperanza's house on Mango Street and is a place she loves to hide in. Things always seem to get lost there and that is why she likes it so much. One day while she is playing in the garden with Sally, she is frustrated and angry because some of the boys stole Sally's keys. The only way to retrieve them was for her to leave with them and give each one a kiss. Sally happily abides, as Esperanza runs to tell Tito's mother, one of the boys who is taunting her. When she tells his mother, the mother continues ironing, thinking Esperanza silly. Esperanza races back to the garden with twigs and a brick, destined to save her dear friend. However, when she gets there, they all tell her to go away and that she is crazy. At this point, Esperanza feels embarrassed, terrified, and alone. She blacks out being raped, but regains consciousness and sees her dress all green and her shoes all dirty.

"I looked at my feet in their white socks and ugly round shoes. They seemed far away. They didn't seem to be my feet anymore. And the garden that had been such a good place to play didn't seem mine either." Chapter 38, pg. 98

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 6

Chapter 39 - Red Clowns

Esperanza is furious with Sally for lying to her. She tells Esperanza to wait for her at the carnival by the red clowns while she goes off with a boy for a few minutes. She never returns and Esperanza waits and waits. She is furious with Sally for lying to her about men, realizing that sex is not the way they portray it in movies and books. She asks Sally in her mind why she did nothing when the boys were touching her and saying, "I love you, Spanish girl." Esperanza equates the horrible boys with the laughing red clowns she waits with for Sally to return.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 7

Chapter 40 - Linoloeum Roses

Sally gets married to a marshmallow salesman and moves away to a state in which it is legal to marry before eighth grade. Esperanza thinks Sally got married to escape, despite Sally's claims of happiness. She has her own money to do whatever she wants and buy whatever she wants. However, her husband does get angry sometimes and breaks things. Sally is not allowed to use the phone or wait by the window or do much of anything.

Topic Tracking: Family 10



Chapter 41 - The Three Sisters

Lucy and Rachel's baby sister dies and there are constantly new visitors to pay their respects to the grieving family. Esperanza notices the three sisters who come together and leave together. Three old aunts with blue-veined marble hands and much advice and foresight. They complain about the weather and their ailments. One of the sisters pulls Esperanza aside and tells her how beautiful her name is and that she must make a wish. Soon, she warns Esperanza to always remember her roots:

"When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are...Then I didn't know what to say. It was as if she could read my mind, as if she knew what I had wished for, and I felt ashamed for having made such a selfish wish." Chapter 41, pg. 105

Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams 10



Chapter 42 - Alicia & I Talking on Edna's Steps

Esperanza's friend, Alicia, is from Guadalajara, Mexico, and always speaks about returning home. Esperanza feels like she has no home and refuses to claim Mango Street and the house (of which she is ashamed) as her home. Alicia also informs her that she is Mango Street and that she will return to it one day. Esperanza never wants to return until someone fixes it. They both joke that the mayor will make Mango Street better.

Chapter 43 - A House of My Own

Esperanza wishes for a house of her own, in which nobody tells her what to do or how to clean. It will have her own flowers and decorations and clothing. It is only a picture in her mind.



Chapter 44 - Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes

Esperanza loves to tell stories about everything she has done and everywhere she goes. She has lived on several streets; however, the one that sticks out in her memory is Mango Street, and she realizes how important it is to her. "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. 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" Chapter 44, pg. 110. Esperanza thinks that although she will move around and become free, she will always return for those who cannot do so. Although they will not know or understand why she returns, Esperanza will come back for those who need help.

Topic Tracking: Hopes and Dreams 11