

# Study Guide

## The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_

## **Study Guide Standards**

It helps to know WHY we are reading or learning. This study guide was written to help students learn specific academic skills.

### **English Language Arts skills**

1. We will learn definitions of the terms “writer’s style” and “theme.”
2. We will identify choices this author makes, her “writing style.” As we read this book, we will decide WHY we think she made some of those choices.
3. We will identify themes developed in this book, and we will cite evidence for particular themes.
4. We will have classroom discussions. We will use academic vocabulary (for example, characterization, setting, style, tone, theme, conflict...) to support our opinions about the text.
5. As a final project, we will write a five paragraph academic paper, naming a theme and citing evidence from the book to support that theme.

### **Reading Strategies**

1. We will use context clues to understand new vocabulary.
2. We will ask ourselves questions and try to find the answers to help us understand the text.
3. We will think about how the characters, events, and ideas in this book relate to our own lives.
4. We will infer deeper meaning from the text, understanding more than the author states directly.
5. We will summarize chapters, telling the most important idea and only the very most important details.
6. We will visualize what’s happening, making pictures in our heads so we can understand it better.

**Before we read...**

1. Take a book walk. Read the back of the book and the front of the book. Open it and look at a few pages from the book. What do you notice?

2. When she was a child, the author, Sandra Cisneros, loved a book called The Little House by Virginia Burton. Here is an excerpt from that book:

Once upon a time there was a Little House way out in the country. She was a pretty Little House and she was strong and well built. The man who built her so well said, "This Little House shall never be sold for gold or silver and she will live to see our great-great grandchildren's great-great-grandchildren living in her."

The Little House by Virginia Burton  
published by Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1969

In the book, a city grows up around the Little House until she is completely overshadowed. One day she is rescued by the builder's great-grandson. He moves the house back into the countryside. His family lives there, surrounded by pretty flowers and apple trees.

If this was a favorite book, what kind of house did Sandra Cisneros want?

Much of this story is about where the main character wants to live. She hopes one day to have a wonderful house, a dream house. Write a paragraph (topic sentence, details, concluding sentence) describing your dream house.

“The House on Mango Street” pages 3 – 5







Esperanza tells the readers all about the problems of the house on Mango Street. She says that her parents told her they would only live there for a little while, and then she says: “But I know how these things go.”

Dreams don’t always match real life. Most of us have times when our hopes for our lives don’t match what’s really happening. Write about a time when that was true for you, when what you wanted just didn’t seem as if it could ever come.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Hairs” p 6 -7

Cisneros tells us about Esperanza’s family by using poetic language to describe their hair. Complete the chart to explore how Esperanza feels about her family. The poetic style helps us to visualize, but also to know what the characters are like.

Person	Words about their hair	Looks like	How she feels
Papa	“like a broom, all up in the air.”		Maybe he’s stiff or maybe he’s very strong.
Esperanza			
Carlos			
Nenny			
Kiki			
Mother			

“Boys & Girls” page 8 – 9

In this vignette, Esperanza says that in her culture, boys and girls “live in separate worlds.” She says the boys won’t let people see them talking to their sisters outside of the house.

Why do you think Esperanza’s brothers worried about being seen talking to girls? What would the boys say about why they don’t talk to their sisters in public?

Some people believe men and women should behave differently. In some cultures, this can be very strict. Think about messages you have received about what’s OK or not OK for men and women. What are some messages? Write about your reaction to them.

\*\*\*\*\*

“My Name” page 10 – 11

This is the first time we hear Esperanza’s name. We also learn about her grandmother and how Esperanza feels about how she should live.

What does Esperanza share about her grandmother and how she lived? Do you agree with Esperanza’s feelings?

Esperanza chose “Zeze the X” for a name. If you could pick a name for yourself, what would you pick? How would it make a difference in your life?

“Cathy Queen of Cats” page 12 – 13

In this vignette, Cathy says some things that are very offensive, very hurtful. Identify at least 5 hurtful comments she makes and tell how they could hurt someone.

**Cathy says:**

**It could hurt because:**


What does Cathy think about herself? Do you agree with her?

\*\*\*\*\*

“Our Good Day” page 14 – 16

This is a fun story, but it can be a little confusing. Check your comprehension. Write a summary of this little story using no more than three sentences.

We know a lot about Esperanza now. Describe the kind of person she is. Would she be a friend of yours?

Looking back at “Cathy, Queen of Cats” and “Our Good Day”...

Compare and Contrast Cathy and Esperanza. Try the first three topics, then write your own.

Topic	Cathy	Esperanza
Ethnic Background		
Prejudices		
Socio-Economic Status		

\*\*\*\*\*

“Laughter” page 17 – 18

Find examples of figurative language in this chapter. Tell what you think Cisneros hoped we would infer. An example from the previous chapter is done for you.

Example of Figurative Language	What we might infer...
from the last chapter... “...the wheels are like spaghetti”	the wheels wiggle and are soft.

“Gil’s Furniture Bought & Sold” page 19 – 20

On page 20, Cisneros uses figurative language to describe types of music. List some examples.

Now you try it. Try describing *rap music* or *hip-hop music* in a figurative way.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Meme Ortiz” page 21 – 22  
and “Louie, His Cousin Louie, and His Other Cousin” pages 23 – 25

Newspaper stories are special kinds of summaries. They begin with a headline – one short sentence that tells the main idea. Then they have one paragraph that summarizes what is most important about the event.

Try it! Write a headline and then write a first paragraph for the newspaper article that could tell about the events in one of these two chapters.

Headline:

First paragraph of the article:



Write three phrases from this chapter that help you get to know Marin.

1.

2.

3.

Based on those three examples, what do you infer about the person Marin is?

What else would you like to know?

\*\*\*\*\*

Those Who Don't page 28

Esperanza describes people who are afraid to be in her neighborhood. She also tells us that she would be afraid in some other neighborhoods. Some people are more comfortable around people they are used to.

Have you ever been afraid that you were in the wrong place? Write about that experience.

The title of this chapter comes from the first lines of a Mother Goose rhyme; “There was an old woman who lived in a shoe. She had so many children; she didn’t know what to do.” The story shows us a different side of the neighborhood.

Every community has a variety of people. Have you ever known someone like the Vargas kids, who just didn’t follow the rules? Write about the person ... or people.

\*\*\*\*\*

Alicia Who Sees Mice, page 31 – 32

A theme is a message a reader finds in a text. Some examples of themes from this book are::

- There are many kinds of love.
- People need to find a place to belong.
- Women sometimes feel trapped.
- Growing up isn’t easy, but it’s important.

We find the theme by considering the title, the events, and the characters in the story as well as the ending – how things end helps us understand the message the author is giving us.

Make notes about the important parts of this chapter, the people, what they care about and how things are at the end of the vignette.

What message do you think Cisneros wants us to have?

Darius and the Clouds, page 33 – 34

This vignette uses a poetic style. Find examples of poetic elements, such as repetition, metaphors and similes.

Why do you think Cisneros use a poetic style as she writes?

\*\*\*\*\*

And Some More, page 35 – 38

Cisneros doesn't use quotation marks when she writes. This can make the book harder to read. In this vignette, she starts out telling us which character says which thing, but as the story moves faster and faster, she drops out the explanations.

This is a conversation between Esperanza, Nenny, Lucy and Rachel. In a group of four students, divide up the conversations on page 37, deciding which character said each line. Read the conversation aloud as you imagine it might have sounded.

*Need a hint?*

- *Nenny is giving the lists of names for the clouds.*
- *You can often tell who speaks because the next speaker uses their name.*

Would you like other books to be written in this style? Why or why not?

At this point in the novel, we begin a new direction for Esperanza's story. We have learned about her background. Now we begin to learn about how Esperanza begins to grow up, to become a woman.

- The Family of Little Feet; p. 39 – 42
- A Rice Sandwich; p. 43 – 45
- Chanclas; p. 46 – 48
- Hips; p. 49 – 52

As you read these vignettes, notice events and symbols (high heels...) of growing up or of being aware of sexuality. Make notes below. Examples are filled in for you.

<b>Events or symbols</b>	<b>What I think ...</b>
<p><u>The Family of Little Feet</u></p> <p>"We have legs."</p>	<p>They never thought about legs before.</p>
<p><u>A Rice Sandwich</u></p>	<p>Esperanza is trying to be different.</p>
<p><u>Chanclas</u></p>	<p>I have never been to a dance.</p>
<p><u>Hips</u></p> <p>Esperanza says her hips just appeared one day.</p>	<p>She's a little embarrassed.</p>

Themes are messages from the author. Think about these possible themes. Write the letter of a theme next to your notes above to identify the author's message.

- A. There are many kinds of love.
- B. People need to find a place to belong.
- C. Women sometimes feel trapped.
- D. Growing up isn't easy, but it's important.

The First Job; page 53 – 55

Summarize the events in this vignette.

What advice would you give Esperanza?

\*\*\*\*\*

Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark; page 56 – 57

In this vignette, Cisneros again uses poetic elements, such as repetition, to help us feel what Esperanza and her father feel. Esperanza repeats words to emphasize ideas and to emphasize feelings.

Find examples of repetition and write what it helps the reader feel or think.

<u>Quote</u>	<u>Feeling or thought it emphasizes</u>
EX: "crumples like a coat and cries, my brave Papa cries."	You know that she's really surprised that he was crying.

No one grows up without making some mistakes. Some mistakes hurt other people; some hurt those who make the mistakes.

Write about your reactions to reading this vignette. What could you say to Esperanza? Have you ever done something you wish you hadn't done? What helps you move on and keep going?

Which of the themes from Study Guide page 12 is best supported by this vignette?

\*\*\*\*\*

Elenita, Cards, Palm, Water; page 62 – 64

List some of the superstitions Esperanza mentions in this vignette.

Invent a superstition about our school that is not true. For example, "If your locker number is even, you will fall in love this year," or "If you have A lunch, you will get an A in your fourth period class." Could some people believe this?

Elenita tells Esperanza that she will have "a home of the heart." What do you think this means?

The people in Esperanza's neighborhood didn't know much about Geraldo, but they did notice his death. Imagine that the newspaper wrote about it. What might the headline be?

Neighborhood newspaper's Headline:

Now imagine that Geraldo's family found out what happened to him. Their town newspaper also might write a story about his death. Think about how it might be different. Write a new headline for the article in Geraldo's town newspaper.

Geraldo's hometown newspaper's headline:

\*\*\*\*\*

Edna's Ruthie; page 67 – 69  
The Earl of Tennessee; page 70 – 71

Esperanza is too young to understand what's happening in these two stories; all she can tell us is what she THINKS is happening.

What do you infer is true about Ruthie and the Earl of Tennessee?

Ruthie:

The Earl of Tennessee:

Imagine a very small child sees two teenagers smoking cigarettes in the park. The teens hide their cigarettes when a car drives past. Then they start smoking again. Another car drives by and the teens hide their cigarettes again.

How might a young child tell Mom about what happened?

Sire; page 72 – 73

Esperanza tells this story from her point of view, but Sire has a point of view, too. How would this story be different if Sire told it? Rewrite the first paragraph from Sire's point of view. The beginning is done for you.

*I like to watch Esperanza walk down the street with her nose in the air. She does not look at me, but I know she notices me.*

\*\*\*\*\*

Four Skinny Trees; page 74 – 75

List some of the metaphors in this vignette. Write what you think they mean.

Metaphor	I think it means....
<i>Ex: "with skinny necks and pointy elbows"</i>	<i>The trees don't have many leaves and they look too thin.</i>

Why do you think Cisneros used a poetic style in this vignette?



The next four vignettes tell about neighborhood women whom Esperanza knows and thinks about. Use this chart to make notes about your reaction to their story.

<u>Neighborhood Woman</u>	<u>Your thoughts about the situation</u>
No Speak English; page 76 – 78 <i>Mamacita</i>	
Rafaela ...; page 79 and 80 Rafaela	
Sally; page 81 – 83 Sally	
Minerva Writes Poems; page 84 – 85 Minerva	

Which theme from page 12 do these vignettes support well?

\*\*\*\*\*

*Sally is a special kind of character, called a “foil.” She is a bit like the main character, Esperanza, but there are very large differences in their lives and their choices. By seeing how differently another character’s life is, we can understand the main character more clearly. The differences can also help us know what message the author is giving us.*

*Pay attention to the descriptions of Sally, her home life and the choices she makes. Does she seem to want something similar to Esperanza or something different?*

We read about what Esperanza wants for her very own home one day.

Read critically:

What does she seem to want?

How do we know?

Why does she want that sort of home?

\*\*\*\*\*

Beautiful & Cruel; page 88 – 89

A Smart Cookie; page 90 – 91

In these two vignettes Esperanza compares herself to beautiful, cruel Hollywood women and to her own mother. She compares herself to others to help her decide how she'll live one day.

Write quotes from the text that help you know what Esperanza wants for her future. Explain each quote, showing how you know what is important to Esperanza.

<b>Quote</b>	<b>What is important to Esperanza</b>

What Sally Said; page 92 – 93

Sally's father is afraid Sally will be like his sisters, described here and on page 81.  
Make notes about those references.

What can we infer about Sally's aunts from these quotes?

Imagine Sally is a student at our school. What could she do to get help?

\*\*\*\*\*

The Monkey Garden; page 94 – 98

In this chapter Cisneros uses descriptions that appeal to our senses. We can see the Monkey Garden in our heads, we know how it smells. Find phrases or sentences from the chapter that help us visualize the Monkey Garden.

<b>Sense</b>	<b>Phrase or Sentence</b>
--------------	---------------------------

Sight

Taste

Sound

Touch

Smell

How do the descriptions change as Esperanza's feelings change?

Red Clowns; page 99 – 100

This is a hard chapter, but people's lives are sometimes very hard. Write about what you hope will happen for Esperanza now. If she were your close friend, what advice would you give her?

\*\*\*\*\*

Linoleum Roses; page 101 – 102

Esperanza says Sally married the salesman to escape from her father.

Write some questions you would ask Sally now.

What do you think about her "escape?"

Compare Sally and Esperanza

Complete the chart, using the suggested traits and any you would like to add.

<b><u>Character Traits</u></b>	<b><u>Sally</u></b>	<b><u>Esperanza</u></b>
Appearance		
Family		
Friendships		
Sexual choices		

Write a descriptive paragraph about one of the two characters. OR Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting the two characters.

The Three Sisters; page 103 – 105

Summarize the events in this chapter. What do the wise women promise Esperanza and what do they insist that she promise to do? Why was Esperanza surprised?

\*\*\*\*\*

Alicia & I Talking on Edna's Steps; page 106 – 107

Draw a picture of Esperanza and Alicia sitting on the steps.

Alicia says Esperanza will always belong to Mango Street. How is that like what the three sisters said?

What theme does that idea support?

This vignette seems to be a poem. Find examples of poetic elements, like repetition and simile. Does this style help us understand the author's message? How?

<u>Quote</u>	<u>What I think about it.</u>

\*\*\*\*\*  
Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes; page 109

Think about the list of themes people find in The House on Mango Street.

- A. There are many kinds of love.
- B. People need to find a place to belong.
- C. Women sometimes feel trapped.
- D. Growing up isn't easy, but it's important

Esperanza says she's going to come back one day. What theme does that seem to fit with?

Sandra Cisneros dedicated this book "A las Mujeres," "To the Women." What theme does that dedication seem to fit with?

Now it's your turn. What theme do you think was the most important for you? If you found a different message, or another way to say one of these themes, write that.

## References

Activity Pack, Prestwick House, Inc, Cheswold, DE

Mary Hudson, Anoka Hennepin Schools, May 2012. Revised April, 2013