

### *The House on Mango Street* Journal topics

1. How does the ending of *The House on Mango Street* complete a circle?
2. Why do you think Cisneros tells the reader about Esperanza's house before she writes about her name? Why is where Esperanza lives more important than who she is?
3. How does she feel about the men in "The Family of Little Feet," "Chanclas," "The First Job," "Sire," and "The Red Clowns"?
4. Throughout *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros's narrator describes herself from two points of view: as she sees herself and as she believes others see her. We can find an example of this in "My Name": "At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth." [11] Where else in the book does Cisneros convey this dual consciousness? How does Esperanza see herself? How does she think other people perceive her?
5. Although Esperanza is clever and often very perceptive, she is still a child, and Cisneros sometimes shows her failing to see the significance of things that would be obvious to someone older. An example can be found on pages 24-5, when Esperanza and her friends take a ride in a flashy car driven by Louie's cousin, who is promptly arrested by the police. An adult might be suspicious about the new car and would probably not wave so cheerfully when Louie was taken away. What is the effect of making Esperanza what is sometimes called an "unreliable narrator"? Where else in the story does Cisneros use this technique?
6. At the novel's end, Esperanza declares that she is too strong for Mango Street to keep her forever. What is the nature of her strength? How does Cisneros establish this characteristic elsewhere in the book?
7. In "Boys and Girls" [8-9], Cisneros writes, "The boys and the girls live in separate worlds." In "Beautiful & Cruel," there is the declaration "I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain." [88] How would you describe the respective worlds in which Cisneros's boys and girls live? What kind of men and women are they likely to become when they grow up? How would you sum up the book's depiction of relations between the sexes? Use incidents and descriptions in such stories as "My Name," "Marin," "Alicia Who Sees Mice," "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut and Papaya Juice on Tuesdays," "Sally," "Minerva Writes Poems," "Beautiful & Cruel," "Sally Says," and "The Monkey Garden."
8. In the stories "My Name" and "No Speak English," Cisneros describes a gulf between two languages, a gap of meaning and of feeling. In English, for example, Esperanza means hope; in Spanish, says the narrator, it suggests sadness and waiting [10]. How

does Esperanza feel about her two languages—and by extension, about her two cultures? How does she feel about the society outside her barrio? Look particularly at the chapters "Cathy Queen of Cats," "Those Who Don't," "Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark," "Geraldo No Last Name," and "Bums In the Attic."

9. When Esperanza visits Elenita to have her fortune told, the witch tells her that she sees "an anchor of arms" and "a home in the heart." What is the possible significance of these visions? How do they tie in to themes Cisneros develops elsewhere in the book?
  
10. Explore the growth of Esperanza's belief in the power of writing. Where does the subject first show up and how does it develop? What are the influences that shape Esperanza's faith in her writing and herself? Please remember to name the chapters where you find important information. When you quote from the book, place the page number of the quotation in parentheses after the quote. If the quote is longer than two lines you must indent the entire quote half an inch as was done with the quotes I used below in the study guide. Examples of long quotes in the study guide are found in "Geraldo No Last Name" and "Bums in the Attic."
  
11. How might Esperanza describe the "American Dream"? Does it compare or contrast to your vision of the "American Dream"?
  
12. Try to examine the novel from a Cultural Materialist or Marxist lens. What impact does economic class have on the lives of the characters? To what extent are their choices either limited or influenced by their economic realities? What can you infer about Cisneros' stand towards capitalism based on her depiction of society in this story?