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**Literature**  
Teaching Unit  
*Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide*



**The House on  
Mango Street**

by Sandra Cisneros

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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# Literature Teaching Unit

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# The House on Mango Street

## Objectives

*By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to*

1. comment on the symbolism in this novel; specifically discuss the possible use of “feet” and “trees” as symbols.
2. discuss the author’s episodic style of writing and the unusual structure of the novel; be able to point out examples of
  - the use of vignettes or small literary sketches
  - the use of rhyming phrases similar to stanzas in a poem
  - the lack of traditional punctuation for conversations between the characters.
3. relate how the author expresses her cultural identity in the following areas:
  - the importance of family unity in times of crisis
  - the responsibility of the older siblings for the younger children
  - place of females in a Mexican/American household.
4. recognize the author’s frequent use of metaphors to describe life on Mango Street, particularly in regard to the
  - red balloon
  - music box
  - tree in Meme’s backyard
  - monkey garden.
5. discuss the lives of women on Mango Street and consider the extent to which the options available to them to improve their lives are limited by
  - early marriage
  - abuse by husbands and fathers
  - lack of life experience due to dominating men in their lives
  - pressure by society to be docile
  - burden of child rearing.
6. comment on the importance of names to the protagonist and illustrate how she is torn between two cultures.
7. discuss the protagonist’s definition of friendship and her perception of the importance of tolerance of individual differences.

# The House on Mango Street

## Questions for Discussion and Essay

1. How does Esperanza feel about the house on Mango Street at the beginning of the novel? Describe her parent's idea of a "dream house."
2. Why does Esperanza want to be called ZeZe the X?
3. Define metaphor. Discuss how Cisneros uses the following metaphors to help describe Esperanza's life on Mango Street by comparing Esperanza to
  - a red balloon
  - the music box in the junk store
  - the large tree in Meme's backyard which was chosen for the First Annual Tarzan Jumping Contest.
4. Why does Esperanza try to prevent Sally from kissing the boys to get back her keys? Why doesn't Tito's mother help rescue Sally from her son?
5. Find an example of rhyming phrases in the chapters. What other elements of poetry are present in this novel?
6. What are the advantages in writing a novel in short episodes or vignettes?
7. Why do you think the following phrase is found in both the first and last chapters of the book?

"We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina...."
8. Cite incidents from the story to support that Esperanza believes God watches over the people on Mango Street.
9. What does Aunt Lupe tell Esperanza after she reads her aunt a poem she has written? Why do Esperanza and her friends make fun of Aunt Lupe?
10. List three chapters from the novel that mention feet. What do you think feet symbolize in these chapters?
11. What do the chapters in the book about Sire, Hips, and First Job tell the reader about Esperanza's maturity level?

# The House on Mango Street

## The House on Mango Street

1. Why is the house on Mango Street an improvement over the narrator’s other homes? In what ways does it fall short of her “dream” house?

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2. How large is the narrator’s family? What is their religion? What do you think the following quotation says about the narrator’s feelings about her home?

“I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to.”

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3. What do you think is the significance of the “four little elms the city planted by the curb”?

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**Meme Ortiz**

1. Why do you think Meme and his dog both have two names?

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2. Support or refute the following statement: The huge tree in Meme’s backyard is a metaphor describing how the outside world views Esperanza’s neighborhood. What can the red balls represent?

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3. What does the following passage from the story suggest about Meme’s character?

“This is the tree we chose for the First Annual Tarzan Jumping Contest. Meme won. And broke both arms.”

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**The First Job**

1. Why do the women at work laugh at Esperanza?

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2. What makes Esperanza trust the Oriental man? How does he betray her trust?

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3. This first job is Esperanza’s first opportunity to experience the world away from Mango Street. What does her first job teach her about men and women in general?

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**Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark**

Vocabulary

abuelito – grandfather  
esta muerto – he is dead

1. What do the Mexican people do to honor their dead?

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2. Why does Esperanza’s papa “wake up tired in the dark”? How does Esperanza feel about her father?

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