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Response Journal

Reflections: A Student Response Journal



*The House on
Mango Street*
Sandra Cisneros



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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

The House on Mango Street

The House on Mango Street

1. Ownership, especially of houses, is a significant aspect of American society. Often people's identity and status are associated with the area in which they live, the kind of house they live in, and if they own or rent. The narrator of this story remembers pointing to her apartment and being asked, "You live there?" The way she said it made me feel like nothing.... I knew I had to have a house. A real house."

Describe your home. What does the area and house tell about your identity and social status?

Hairs

2. The narrator shares intimate details of her family. To know the feel and smell of someone's hair and skin is to be close, in a loving way, to that person. Record your memories of the hair and skin of your family members, or the people with whom you are close.
3. Reading this description, I get the impression the narrator feels a sense of security. The association I make for the phrase "the warm smell of bread" is of being provided with something essential and filling, "the bread of life." What impressions and associations do you make with this short sketch?

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Our Good Day

12. Tell about a time you had a good day sharing something with friends.

Laughter

13. What characteristics or understandings do members of your family share?
14. Esperanza describes laughter figuratively: “the shy ice cream bells’ giggle” Think of a person that you know who has distinctive laughter. Describe the laughter in terms of something familiar.

Gil’s Furniture Bought & Sold

15. Write a short human interest story for the local newspaper of Gil’s town. Tell about Gil, his store, and his hidden treasures.

Meme Ortiz

16. What do you find comical in this sketch?
17. What does the image of the huge tree suggest to you?

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**There Was an Old Woman She Had So Many
Children She Didn't Know What to Do**

24. What disturbs you the most about the episode of Rosa Vargas and her children?
25. Esperanza explains that everybody got “tired of being worried about kids who aren’t even yours” and gave up. Do you see Rosa, her situation, and the well-being of her children as hopeless? If not, what might help? Tell of situations that you know of or have heard about in the news that might be considered hopeless.

Alicia Who Sees Mice

26. What would you like to say to Alicia?
27. Perhaps Alicia fears being trapped by poverty or by her father, who believes a woman’s place is taking care of a home. What type of situation or belief system do you want to avoid, perhaps one you fear getting trapped by?

Darius & The Clouds

28. While observing a cloud-filled sky, Darius felt assurance of the presence of God. What do you think and feel when you notice the sky?

The House on Mango Street

Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark

42. Each culture has its own way to “send the dead away” and to express grief. What do you know about your family’s practices?
43. Esperanza is able to understand her father’s sorrow about the loss of his father after she considers how hard her father works and how much she needs him. Often in life one person is able to comfort another by identifying with the feelings of the other person. Tell about a time when you were able to identify with the feelings of another. What did you think about that helped you understand this person?

Born Bad

44. In this chapter, Esperanza seems to be considering some of the uncomfortable questions of life. First, she thinks about the consequences of being mean. She seems to feel guilty for imitating her dying aunt, the aunt who had been kind to her. She may be trying to excuse what she did when she says, “we didn’t know...” and “we forgot.” At the same time, she states “Most likely I will go to hell and most likely I deserve to be there.” She says she prays for what she did to Aunt Lupe. Esperanza mentions dreams that haunt her.
State your positions on the following questions: What are the consequences of human meanness? Specifically, do you think that people go to hell for being mean? What can people do to relieve their guilt?

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Four Skinny Trees

56. Esperanza says the trees teach. List the “truths of life” the trees are teaching her. For instance, Esperanza states that the trees grow “despite concrete.” “They do not forget to reach.” This suggests that no matter how difficult an individual’s circumstances are, he or she should continue to try and to achieve.
57. Esperanza’s description of the trees uses figurative language. She uses personification when she describes the trees as having necks and elbows. One metaphor is “they...bite the sky with violent teeth.” The line, “Let one forget his reason for being, they’d all drop like tulips in a glass, each with their arms around the other” is a simile.

Select an aspect of nature you feel represents an aspect of human nature. Use figurative language to describe your idea.

No Speak English

58. What do you find comical in this selection?
59. Do you sympathize with Mamacita?
60. Esperanza says, “Every once in a while [he] lets out a cry, hysterical, high, as if he had torn the only skinny thread that kept her alive, the only road out to that country.” The adjectives “hysterical” “high” and the simile of cutting the only thread give a vivid description of what Mamacita feels. Write a descriptive sentence that conveys a person’s feeling. You may need to precede the sentence with the situation the person is in.