

The House on Mango Street Discussion Questions

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

Hairs

Rosettes- little roses

1. What character traits are suggested for each of the following family members by the narrator's description of each one's hair?
 - Papa
 - Carlos
 - Nenny
 - Kiki
2. What does the following quotation suggest about the quality of the narrator's home?
"The snoring, the rain, and Mama's hair that smells like bread."
3. About how old do you think the narrator is at the beginning of the novel?

Boys & Girls

1. What qualities does the narrator want in a best friend?
2. In what way can it be said the narrator has "mixed" feelings about her sister Nenny?
3. This novel is written in a poetic style. What do you think is the meaning of the following metaphor: "Until then I am a red balloon tied to an anchor."

My Name

Chandelier- a holder for several candles or electric lights

1. Why is it bad luck for a woman to be born in the year of the horse?
2. Why does Esperanza say that she has her grandmother's name but doesn't "want to inherit her place by the window"?
3. What does Esperanza dislike about her name? Why do you suppose she wants to be called Zeze the x?

Cathy Queen of Cats

1. This chapter is written partly with Esperanza as the narrator and partly with Cathy narrating. What is the first line narrated by Cathy? What is the last? Why do you think the author decides to write part of this chapter from Cathy's point of view?
2. What does Cathy say to hurt Esperanza? How are Cathy's parents and Esperanza's parents alike?

Our Good Day

1. Briefly describe Lucy and Rachel. Why do you think Esperanza likes them?
2. Why do you think Esperanza decides to buy the bicycle with Lucy and Rachel, knowing she will make Cathy "mad forever"? What does Esperanza learn about herself and the kinds of friends she wants to have?

Laughter

1. In what ways is Esperanza's sister, Nenny, similar to Esperanza?
2. This is an episodic novel written in small vignettes or literary sketches. What observation about family do you think Cisneros is making in this chapter?

Gil's Furniture Bought & Sold

1. What are the "gold glasses floating in the dark"?
2. In what way is Esperanza both disappointed in the music box Nenny finds and delighted with it? To what extent may the box be considered a metaphor for Esperanza's neighborhood?
3. Why do you think the old man does not want to sell the music box?
4. Contrast Nenny's behavior toward the man who owns the junk shop with Esperanza's. Why doesn't Esperanza talk to the old man?
5. Read the following passage from the story. What do you think Esperanza is feeling?
"And then I don't know why, but I have to turn around and pretend I don't care about the box so Nenny won't see how stupid I am."

Meme Ortiz

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

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."

Louie, His Cousin & His Other Cousin

1. Why do you think Marin stands in the doorway of her home, snapping her fingers and singing the same song over and over again? If she is employed selling cosmetics, why does she still need to baby-sit the younger gals?
2. Support or refute the following statement: Louie's cousin might have gotten away with stealing the yellow Cadillac if he had not gone back to Mango Street to give his family a ride in the car.
3. After Louie's cousin is arrested for stealing the yellow car, why do Esperanza and his family all wave to him as the police drive him away? Why aren't they upset he has been arrested?
4. Why do you think Esperanza describes this incident with Louie's cousin as being "important"?

Marin

1. Many critics believe this novel expresses many feminist views. From the perspective of a feminist, what is wrong with Marin's "dream" described in the following passage?
"...she's going to get a real job downtown because that's where the best jobs are, since you always get to look beautiful and get to wear nice clothes and can meet someone in the subway who might marry you."
2. What does the following passage from the novel suggest about Marin's fate? What are her chances of finding someone to rescue her from her life on Mango Street?
"Marin, under 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."

Those Who Don't

1. What does the sentence "All brown all around, we are safe" mean?
2. Support or refute the following statement: Cisneros believes people of all races feel fear and prejudice and fit into the category of "Those Who Don't."

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

1. Cisneros presents many examples of women's lives on Mango Street. What do you think Esperanza learns about a woman's life from Rosa Vargas?
2. Why do the neighbors "give up" on the Vargas children? What can you infer about Angel Vargas' fate by his name?

Alicia Who Sees Mice

1. What is Alicia doing to escape from Mango Street
2. Support or refute the following statement: The description of the mice is a metaphor for a woman's life on Mango Street.
3. Why do you think Alicia is afraid of "four-legged fur. And fathers"?

Darius & the Clouds

1. Sometimes Cisneros rhymes the phrases in her sentence like stanzas in a poem might rhyme. Find a sentence in this chapter which illustrates these rhyming phrases. Do you notice any rhythmic pattern or personification used to create images in this chapter?
2. What do you think the sky represents in the following sentence? "You can fall asleep and wake up drunk on the sky."
3. Support or refute the following statement: Esperanza believes God is looking down at the people on Mango Street and supports their hopes and dreams for the future.

And Some More

1. What evidence is there in this chapter that Rachel and Lucy are learning to be prejudiced against people with dark skin?
2. In the beginning of this chapter the girls are talking about the many different names for snow and clouds. What do you think Cisneros is saying about names in this chapter?
3. Cisneros is well known for her unusual style of writing. Besides the poetic structure of the sentences, what is usual about her style of writing in this chapter? Why are the conversations between the girls sometimes difficult to understand?

The Family of Little Feet

1. Support or refute the following statement: Feet are a symbol for growing up in this chapter.
2. Why do you think Esperanza seems to be surprised the girls "have legs"?
3. What motivates the grocer to threaten the girls with the police if they don't take off their high heels?
4. Why do you suppose "no one complains" when Lucy's mother throws away the shoes?

A Rice Sandwich

1. Esperanza tries to convince her mother to let her eat lunch at school by saying "You would see me less and less and like me better." Her mother writes in the note to the nun,

“As you can see she is very skinny. I hope to God she does not faint.” What do these two statements suggest about the similarity between Esperanza’s personality and her mother’s personality?

2. What evidence is there in this story that Esperanza is ashamed of her house?
3. What do you think Esperanza learns about life when she finally gets to eat her rice sandwich in the canteen?

Chanclas

1. If feet are a symbol for growing up, what do the brown-and-white school shoes mean in this chapter?
2. What is the significance of Esperanza’s first adult dance occurring at a baptism?
3. What evidence is there in the story that Esperanza is beginning to notice the boys and that they are beginning to notice her?

Hips

1. Why does Esperanza think Nenny belongs to a world she, Rachel, and Lucy don’t belong to anymore?
2. How old do you think Esperanza is at this point in the story? What evidence is there that she wants to look more like a woman?

The First Job

1. Why do the women at work laugh at Esperanza?
2. What makes Esperanza trust the Oriental man? How does he betray her trust?
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?

Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark

1. What do the Mexican people do to honor their dead?
2. Why does Esperanza’s papa “wake up tired in the dark”? How does Esperanza feel about her father?

Born Bad

1. What does Esperanza mean when she says, “I think diseases have no eyes.”
2. Why don’t the girls realize their imitations of Aunt Lupe are wrong?
3. What is the impact of Aunt Lupe’s illness on her husband and children?
4. Why do you think Aunt Lupe says to Esperanza, “You just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free.”?
5. The last line of the chapter reads, “And then we began to dream the dreams.” What kind of dreams do Esperanza and her friends have after Aunt Lupe’s death?

Elenita, Cards, Palm, Water

1. Why do you think Esperanza goes to Elenita, the witch woman, to hear her fortune? What is Esperanza hoping for?
2. List the superstitions or cures attributed to Elenita's power.
3. What does Elenita predict for Esperanza's future? How does Esperanza feel about this prediction?

Geraldo No Last Name

1. Support or refute the following statement with incidents from this chapter: Geraldo is the stereotype of an illegal Mexican whose life is of no importance.

Edna's Ruthie

1. What evidence is there in this chapter that Ruthie may be mentally handicapped?
2. Why do you think Esperanza like Ruthie?

The Earl of Tennessee

1. What indications are there in this chapter that Esperanza is still very young and naïve?
2. Why is a white Southerner like Earl living on Mango Street?

Sire

1. What is the following passage saying about Lois' maturity level compared to Esperanza's? Hint: Remember feet may be a symbol for maturity.
"...she was barefoot, and I saw her barefoot baby toenails all painted pale pink ... her bones are long like ladies' bones ... But she doesn't know how to tie her shoes. I do."
2. How does Esperanza feel about her ability to attract Sire's attention?
3. What is the meaning of the following passage? What are the trees saying?
"Sometimes I hear them laughing late, beer cans and cats and the trees talking to themselves: wait, wait, wait."

Four Skinny Trees

1. What do the four trees teach Esperanza?

No Speak English

1. What do you think is the significance of Mamacita's small pink shoes?
2. Why is Mamacita upset when the baby starts speaking English? What is Cisneros saying about Mexican children in this chapter?

Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut and Papaya Juice on Tuesdays

1. What does Esperanza learn from Rafaela about the life of a young married woman on Mango Street?

Sally

1. Why does Sally's father prevent her from leaving their home after school?
2. At one point in this chapter, it is confusing as to whether the author is writing about Sally or about Esperanza. Find a sentence in this chapter that is about Sally but is also about Esperanza's dream.
3. Assume Sally's dreams in the chapter are really Esperanza's dreams. What does Esperanza want more than anything else?

Minerva Writes Poems

1. What does Esperanza mean at the end of the chapter when she says, "I don't know which way she'll go. There is nothing I can do."?
2. Why do you think Esperanza might be particularly moved by Minerva's sad life?

Bums in the Attic

1. Why is Esperanza happy to tell her guest that she has "bums" in the attic? What is she saying about her life on Mango Street?

Beautiful and Cruel

1. Who is Esperanza talking about in the following passage?

"...but I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain."

2. Many critics consider *The House on Mango Street* a feminist novel. How does the following passage support this idea?

"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."

A Smart Cookie

1. Why does Esperanza's mother quit school? What advice does she give her daughter?
2. List Esperanza's mother's talents. What can't she do?

What Sally Said

1. Why does Sally go home with her abusive father? Given what you have learned about life on Mango Street, do you think he is justified in worrying about Sally's virtue?

The Monkey Garden

1. Support or refute the following statement with incidents from the chapter: The monkey garden is a metaphor for Esperanza's childhood.
2. Why do you suppose Esperanza feels "angry inside" when Sally agrees to kiss the boys to get her keys back?
3. Compare the reaction of Titos' mother to his kissing a girl with the reaction of Sally's father when he catches her talking to a boy. What is your opinion about the behavior of these two parents? Are they normal? Is it fair?
4. Why do you think Esperanza feels "ashamed" when she tries to stop the boys from kissing Sally? What makes her feel so terrible she wants to be dead?

Red Clowns

1. What happens to Esperanza at the carnival? Why does she say Sally lies to her?
2. A clown is defined as a person who constantly plays the fool, a trickster, and buffoon. Using this definition what do you think the red clowns might represent in this story?

Linoleum Roses

1. What is the significance of the title of this chapter? What do the linoleum roses represent?
2. Approximately, how old is Esperanza at this point in the story?

The Three Sisters

1. What are the signs or superstitions that signal the death of the baby?
2. What do you think Esperanza wishes for?
3. Why does the sister with the marble hands tell Esperanza that she must "remember to come back for the others"?

Alicia & I Talking on Edna's Steps

1. How much time has passed since the beginning of the book? How are Guadalajara and Mango Street alike?
2. Why does Alicia think it is important for Esperanza to think of Mango Street as her home and return to it someday?

A House of My Own

1. Why do you think Esperanza describes her house as “clean as paper before the poem”?

Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes

1. Where is Esperanza in this last chapter? How does she manage to escape from Mango Street?
2. Why does she describe herself as a girl who “didn't want to belong”? This is a coming-of-age novel. What has Esperanza learned about herself in the past year? How has she changed her attitude toward Mango Street?
3. Why do you think the following passage from the first chapter is repeated in the last chapter?
“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.”