

The House on Mango Street

By Sandra Cisneros

Grade Level: Middle and High School

Description:

The House on Mango Street is a collection of vignettes centered around a little girl growing up in the Latino section of Chicago. This novel contains many interweaving social, personal, and economic issues. The focus of this lesson is to highlight key points at which the teacher can, and should, lead the class discussion into the topic of housing rights in the United States.

Pre reading Questions:

- ✓ What are the benefits / disadvantages of homogeneously cultured sections of cities? (i.e. China Town, Little Italy)
- ✓ Is the American Dream accessible to everyone?

Highlight During Reading:

- ★ The House on Mango Street (pg.3)-

Immediately we are introduced to the Esperanza's pride, even as a child, in home ownership, and the disadvantages of life as a home renter. As she retells her housing history, attention should be placed on the subpar living conditions the family endured. Discuss events that may have led up to a family accepting a home in unlivable condition, and the possible reasons they remained there. What are the rights of tenants and landlords? How do we protect the rights of both parties?

The family dream home, the same dream home of Americans from many different backgrounds, is unattainable. Discuss the differences between the dream home and the home the family purchased. The pride in ownership is marred by not attaining the dream house that was a family goal for years. Esperanza associates much of her worth with the quality of her home. "You live there? The way she said it made me feel like nothing." (pg 5)

- ★ Cathy Queen of Cats (pg 12)-

The last sentence ("In the meantime they'll just have to move a little farther north from Mango Street, a little farther away every time people like us keep moving in.") leads naturally into a discussion of White Flight and the stereotypes / generalizations associated with it.

Ask students what examples of gentrification they have witnessed and the feelings associated with it, from BOTH perspectives.

- ★ Those Who Don't (pg 28)-

Fear of “the others” is felt on both sides. Discuss the stereotypes that lead to this fear. Are the books statements accurate today? What are some solutions to end this fear?

- ★ Born Bad (pg 58)-
Lead the class in a discussion of how society views the differently abled. Use this passage to illustrate the poor living conditions of many physically and mentally challenged citizens. What is our responsibility as a community, as a state or nation, to all people? How do we insure fair housing?
- ★ Edna’s Ruthie (pg67)-
Lead a class discussion on how Edna’s actions would change if her tenants knew their rights / the law? How does legal literacy empower a community? What efforts should be made to educate all people on their rights? Who is responsible for that education?
- ★ Alicia & I Talking on Edna’s Steps (pg106)-
The conclusion of this segment should lead into a discussion of the responsibility of private housing conditions in the United States. What does our government have in place to ensure proper living conditions for all? Is what we have in place enough?
- ★ A House of My Own (pg 108)-
Just like the very beginning of the book, we see Esperanza equating self worth, happiness and freedom with home ownership. Not just home ownership, but ownership of a home esthetically beautiful.

Post Reading Activity:

- ✓ Have the students research fair housing efforts in the United States and compare / contrast with the efforts of other countries.