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FICTION

The House on Mango Street

by Sandra Cisneros

Hardcover, 1994, 166p, \$15.95 ISBN 9780375833304

COPY ISBN

Get It Up!—Through a series of vignettes, Esperanza illuminates experiences as a young Mexican American girl and explores what it means to belong. She reveals her struggles with feelings of shame and vulnerability at school and with her friends because of her family's house on Mango Street. As she matures, Esperanza realizes the beauty of her home through its people whose rich lives are interconnected with her own and with the development of her identity. Cisneros's powerful text creates connection across multiple layers of identities and evokes feelings of validation and compassion in its readers. Short, poetic, and rich language builds complex depictions of the people in Esperanza's neighborhood that easily allows readers to establish similarities and differences to their own lives and communities. Esperanza's upbringing in a Chicago Chicane community is told through vignettes, making for a unique storytelling style that will pique the interests of teens. While there are some mature moments, readers will be invested in the characters and their experiences, and a detailed and guided discussion on tough topics will benefit younger students. This story about change and growth will resonate with high schoolers long after the final page is turned.

VERDICT Recommended for all collections.

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LORNA L. PÉREZ
Haunting the House on Mango Street:
Sandra Cisneros's Radical Revisions

SANDRA CISNEROS'S *THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET* IS PERHAPS THE MOST widely read and taught text in Latina literature. Using a deceptively simple format and a deceptively naïve and straightforward narrator, Cisneros chronicles the struggles of growing up poor, Latina, and marginalized in a fictionalized version of what is probably Chicago's Northwest side. While the seeming simplicity of the text makes it phenomenally read-able and profoundly teachable, a careful analysis of the writing and the subject matter reveal a striking revision of the Western literary and theoretical canon, wherein Cisneros places her text into conversation with Sherwood Anderson, Gaston Bachelard, Virginia Woolf, and tangentially Emily Dickenson.

Her appropriation of the form, style, and philosophical complications of her literary predecessors reveals profound and entrenched assumptions about subjectivity, class, and ethnicity, categories that historically and contemporarily marginalize individuals like her protagonist Esperanza Cordero. In engaging—both explicitly and implicitly—the literary predecessors that haunt the house on Mango Street, Cisneros is able to alleviate what Harold Bloom calls the “anxiety of influence” not by attempting to overshadow or destroy her predecessors, but by revealing the ideological constructs that lay in the foundations of their writing, thereby redefining the grounds of subjectivity and revealing the unhomey—or that which remains hidden—in the work. By engaging her literary influences in this way, Cisneros offers a revision to their assumptions, and as such lays the foundation for a radical literature that can encompass positions that have been relegated to the margins.

Geographic Inversions: Cisneros and Anderson

Perhaps the most immediate and obvious example of Cisneros's appropriation and reformation of her literary past can be charted through the form of the work itself. Cisneros's text is not a linear narrative with what could loosely be called a plot line. Rather, the text is a series of inter-related vignettes. This form, which in Cisneros's text profoundly undermines the assumption of masculine language and linearity, is a style that was perhaps first and most famously utilized by Sherwood Anderson in his *Winesburg, Ohio*. Though we see similar form in both canonical and marginalized work throughout the twentieth century—Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology* monologues (thought to have influenced Anderson), Jean



The House on Mango Street

Sandra Cisneros

★★★★☆ 3.69 200,787 ratings · 17,873 reviews

Acclaimed by critics, beloved by readers of all ages, taught everywhere from inner-city grade schools to universities across the country, and translated all over the world, *The House on Mango Street* is the remarkable story of Esperanza Cordero.

Told in a series of vignettes — sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous — it is the story of a young Latina girl growing up in Chicago, inventing for herself who and what she will become. Few other books in our time have touched so many readers.

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