

**Experiencing Esperanza: Understanding “Sheroism” in the Women of Sandra Cisneros’s  
*The House on Mango Street* through Performative Embodiment**

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. . . the image is not the residue of an impression, it is not an imprint that fades with time; on the contrary, the image that is produced through speech gives us the speaking subject and the subject spoken of, entwined in a unity of expression. If we move from speech to the written text, the situation becomes richer with possibilities. The text makes the image possible, the reader makes it actual and the image is something new in our language, an entity of reflection that was not there before, it is the poetic subjectivity in which we participate.

. . . These pages [are] reflective, aimed at participation and not at imposing closure on the text for other readers. As readers, regarding the self-invention of writing, we must respect the specificity of the self-invention of writing, we must respect the specificity of the self-invention of writing, we must respect the specificity of the self-invention, that is the Chicana coming of age. In all patriarchal societies, but especially in this one, there is the imposition of the sign of gender which serves to silence women, to force them to particularize themselves through the indirect means of the way and style in which they serve others.

-Maria Elena de Valdes

**WHAT MY UNIT WILL TEACH**

My curriculum unit will examine the protagonists of Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* as female heroes or, better yet, “sheroes.” This examination will entail a detailed character analysis of the major protagonists of each literary vignette in the work, ultimately birthing performances based on this analysis. More specifically, this topic will enable my students to explore the intricacies of their self-identity as pre-pubescents through the vehicle that reflects the uncomfortable liminality between childhood and adulthood: the body.

To illustrate how this curriculum unit is in compliance with the vision I have for my theatre program, it is important to disclose the name I have created for my theatre students. The name symbolizes the cohesiveness necessary to transition from the situational relationships that come from the classroom to the lifelong ties that are born out of a felt-sense of community. It is through community that mutual trust is established. It is this trust that awards license for the vulnerability necessary to maximize their potential as actors. The name of our theatre company is the acronym C.O.L.O.R.E.S., which stands for Cultivating Outstanding Lives through Orchestrated Rigor and Effort for Success. I chose this acronym because it is catchy, it represents the demographic community that will be benefiting most from this curriculum, and it helps instill a sense of pride in the identity of the individual and collective.

The word *colores* is Spanish for the word colors. I chose the Spanish word because it has more pizzazz than the English word. The word also represents the demographic of our school, which is comprised of students of Latino descent. Hamilton Middle School is approximately seventy-five percent Latino. I am a firm believer in not only working with what I have, but celebrating what I have. It is through this small, yet significant celebration of culture that I am able to instill a sense of pride in my students.

## **WHY TEACHING THIS TOPIC TO MY STUDENTS IS IMPORTANT**

In my two years as a novice teacher, I have found that a predominant amount of Latino students are not prone to theatre as a subject that they like or take seriously. There seems to be the socialization within the Latino community that causes feminine shyness and masculine shunning. It is challenging to get my Latina students to come out of their shells and take risks when it comes to performing. They seem to be extremely self-conscious in the presence of their male counterparts. Although this sort of behavior is common when it comes to middle school students, I have witnessed more extreme cases with my Latina students in particular.

As far as my male students, many of them have been taught that anything that requires emotional expression of any kind is “gay.” Usually, even though theatre is an elective, most of my male Latino students are not in theatre because they elected it, they are in it because no other electives were open, and they were left without a choice. The C.O.L.O.R.E.S. name enables them to assume ownership of the theatre company through what it stands for in meaning and the application of its meaning. My hope is that through *The House on Mango Street*, written by Latina author Sandra Cisneros, featuring the familiar voice of a Latina pubescent girl, my female students will find strength in their own voices. (I plan to help the young men identify with the male Latino expressive voice in Gary Soto’s *Living Up the Street* as the male counterpart to *The House on Mango Street*.) Although this text is not the focal point of this curriculum unit, I will award that unit equal attention in my continued study.

My goal is to get intimately engaged with the literary vignettes in such a way that would enable them to achieve some “comfortability” with their bodies that is a complete aberration of the age and culture that typically circumscribes their behavior. I want them to use the characters in the text as a protective mask under which they are actually expressing themselves. The way the students will take ownership of the work is by infusing elements of their culture(s) that help define them as individuals and a collective. We will explore aspects of their culture that involve race, age, gender, sexuality, class, culture, hobbies, collective interests, and intelligence.

Ultimately, because of their authentic, distinctive negotiation of these issues, the performance will reflect Cisneros’s primary protagonist, Esperanza, as well as each member of the female community of Mango Street as heroines in their own right. The women represent each of these issues quite differently, holistically reflecting the dimensions of Latina identity before an analysis of the individual women in the work, a reflection of the how this work came to personally impact me is in order.

The foundation of my collegiate education was a course of study entitled Speech Communication, Oral Interpretation. Currently this course of study is known as Performance Studies. More specifically, my course of study specialized in a performative adaptation of one's analyses, criticism, celebration, and ultimate interpretation of a piece of literature. The invigorating aspect of this work lay in the freedom to manipulate our blocking, audience, and overall performance in ways that traditional theatre did not embrace. For example, Performance theory gives license to manipulating the performer-audience relationship so that there is no demarcation of space between performer and audience. This manipulation is often intended to get the audience to participate in the performance in some way. I intend to do this in my performative adaptation of *The House on Mango Street* by having the students perform in the audience, playing off of them by being "in their faces."

Another example of non-traditionalism that the Performance Studies discipline embraces is the interaction between the triple threat of song, dance, and dramatization. It is nothing to use song and dance to supplement one's dramatic interpretation of literature. This multi-dimensional form of expression is typical of performance work that comes out of the Performance Studies discipline. Since the cultural context of *The House on Mango Street* is rooted out of the Latino tradition, a strong presence of Latino song and dance is inevitable. Today, this non-traditional mode of performance would be considered performance art, or avant-garde theatre. In the film industry, the independent genre would fall into that category. In Performance Studies discipline, the idea of the world being a stage was taken literally! Furthermore, whatever we needed for the performance we ourselves had to provide. There was no such thing as a set designer, and costume designer, etc, director, etc. We, as the performers, wore all those hats.

At the graduate level, the context for performance transcended literature and dealt with ethnography, which in this discipline deals with the study of culture through embodiment. I have performed as a village woman in a performative re-creation of the annual Osun Festival that takes place in the city of Osogbo, Nigeria. This performance emerged from my professor's years of ethnographic research of the event.

I also produced and performed a one-woman show based on my ethnographic research on African American women inflicted with cancer. This work was very personal for me, as the cancer, in life changing ways, has impacted my family. My grandmother, who played a key role in my life, succumbed to the disease at the age of seventy-four. My aunt, who has been battling cancer for almost ten years, has had approximately seven surgeries, and will never be able to eat solid food again.

Each of these ethnographic studies is a study of culture. The first being a study of the culture of a people as a result of ethnicity, and the second is an auto-ethnography, which features the commonality an altered lifestyle of my loved ones inflicted by disease.

Hence, when I became a teacher, I was inspired by the idea of my students celebrating their culture through a performative adaptation of literature. Not only does it allow them to take ownership of the literature, but it also gives theatre more legitimacy as a course of study that is

highly interdisciplinary, academically enriching, and essential for a transcendental understanding of literature through embodiment. For example, there is one thing to read “yo mama,” within the context of a written dialogue featuring two people playing the dozens, but it is an entirely different thing to perform one’s literary interpretation of “yo mama,” with the use of the live, physical body to add dimension to the meaning.

The idea to adapt the literary vignettes of *The House on Mango Street* to performance came from Dr. Joni L. Jones, my former professor and advisor to my thesis. When I was a graduate student at the University of Texas in Austin, I was in Dr. Jones’s office one day, engaging in small talk before we began discussing my thesis; she inquired about my then-teaching position at Consuelo Mendez Middle School. I shared with her that I was not sure what we would be doing for our One-Act-Play competition. She simply said, “Why don’t you adapt *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros?” I went to the library, checked out the book, hand-picked some girls, did a read-through, and the rest was history!

Sandra Cisneros is an amazing author who is able to communicate in a form of poetic prose that celebrates Latino culture through criticism, analysis, and the simplicity of language that discloses complicated issues. This small book of loosely related literary vignettes features the lives and cultures of Latina women through the eyes of a Chicana, or Mexican American girl. While Cisneros situates Esperanza as a first person limited-omniscient narrator, Esperanza’s voice provides strong innuendo about the complications that occur in the lives of Latina women. So not only is it important to focus on what is said, it is also important to focus on what is implied, or even unsaid.

There is a lot of reading between the lines to accomplish in the literary vignettes of *Mango Street*. It is what is between the lines that allows us to analyze the very secret places that reflect the multi-layered lives of these women, and celebrate them as heroines not for ground-breaking accomplishments, but for the tenacity with which they are able to endure cycles of dysfunction that occur as a consequence of being a member of that particular culture.

Cisneros also takes literary autonomy in shifting the roles of her literary antagonists in relationship with Esperanza, as protagonists, by infusing life in giving them a first person limited omniscient voice. The girls to whom she gives voices are her friends about whom there is something “different.” I hypothesize that they are also the girls who will make it out of the barrio of Mango Street. They will leave an impact on the world and give much back to the community from which they have come. The difference between Esperanza and her friends in their first person narratives is that Esperanza has a significantly larger degree of omniscience than her friends do. This omniscience is humble, however, because her tone is not authoritative in knowledge. She simply uses her senses to describe what she sees, and responds to it through reflection. Maria Elena de Valdés comments that Esperanza “describes what is around her, she responds to people and places, but most importantly, she reflects on a world she did not make, and cannot change, but must control or she will be destroyed” (62).

Esperanza is able to speak not only about herself, but the people in the community as well. She is also empowered to speak her opinions of the few friends who will be awarded the privilege of also speaking for themselves. When Esperanza is with her friends, she shares what she chooses to share of her friends' opinions about others they encounter on Mango Street. She may allow them to say a word or two, but it is all under her control. It is clear that Esperanza is Cisneros, as Esperanza is the one who incurs the greatest measure of personal freedom and public success through the written word.

Esperanza also awards a small ration of the power of a first-person limited omniscient voice with girls closest to her who also have the potential to transcend the silence and subjugation Mango Street – which serves a metaphor for Latino Culture – imposes on its women. While Esperanza speaks of some of the men, the text discloses her particular preoccupation with the existence of the women who represent Mango Street. First off, Esperanza speaks of herself as a young woman coming of age, which sets the tone for how she speaks of the other women, each of which represent heroes in their own right.

Cisneros uses these women as a metaphor for the many faces of the women that represent Latino culture. These women are: Mama Cordero, Magdalena (Nene), Alicia, Cathy, Elenita, Lucy, Mamacita, Minerva, Meme, Marin, Minerva, Rafaela, Ruthie, Sally, The Three sisters, Rosa Vargas, and her little sister Nene.

### **Character Analysis of the Women of Mango Street**

“In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters,” says Esperanza Cordero. In a child-like voice on the verge of possibly rebellion or negotiation of pre-pubescence, Esperanza paints a literary picture of her impressions of the world that encompasses her. Her perceptions range from humorous anecdotes pulled from life in the barrio to more references to crime and sexual provocation. Through Esperanza's eyes, the reader catches short, yet vividly substantive glimpses of the other characters, particularly the females in the neighborhood.

In part, Esperanza finds her sense of self-identity among these women. With a sense of awe and mystery, for example, she looks to older girls who adorn their bodies with black clothing, and their faces with make-up. She experiments with womanhood herself in “The Family of Little Feet,” a story in which Esperanza and her friends clumsily and awkwardly prance about the neighborhood in their mother's high heel shoes, but flee when they attract unwanted attention from a “dirty old man.”

Esperanza's sense of self-identity is also interwoven with her family's house, which emerges throughout the book as an important metaphor for her circumstances. She longs for her own house, which for her, symbolizes the stability, financial means, and sense of belonging that she lacks in her environment: “a house all my own-Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem” (108).

With each progressive literary vignette, Esperanza matures. She turns from looking outward at her world to a more introspective viewpoint that reveals several sides of her character. Esperanza is a courageous girl who recognizes the existence of a world that transcends Mango Street, and who, toward the end of the book, is compelled by her own inner strength to exonerate herself from the culturally relativistic constraints Mango Street represents, specifically for its women.

She begins to break these constraints through writing about herself and the women of Mango Street, who would otherwise remain faceless and voiceless. Writing becomes the vehicle by which Esperanza expresses empathy for those whose lives will be physically and psychologically circumscribed by the limitations of the barrio, the only piece of the world many of them will ever experience:

One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away. Friends and neighbors will say, 'What happened to Esperanza? Where did she go with all these books and paper? Why did she march so far away?' They will not know I have gone far away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out. (134)

Esperanza expresses these sentiments in the final vignette of the work, *Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes*. Esperanza will be one of the few who actually get to say goodbye to fulfill the purpose that she can only fulfill outside of Mango Street. In *Bums in the Attic*, Esperanza says, "One day I'll own my own house, but I won't forget who or where I came from" (108). The tension between Esperanza's emotional ties to Mango Street and her desire to transcend that world establishes a sense of attraction and repulsion that characterize the work. The symbolic level of the image of her house on Mango Street, after which the book has been entitled, also represents the existence of this tension.

Everything about her house on Mango Street repels her. We see that the title alone reveals her non-desire to lay a claim to the house. We only know that the House on Mango Street is her residence through her apologetic, ashamed description of the home. The first vignette, which mirrors the title of the book, opens with "We didn't always live on Mango Street." Although Esperanza admits that the house on Mango Street is the most stable residence they have had to date, she still voices her disappointment in the quality of the home by the retort, "But even so, it's not the house we thought we'd get." She also expresses her disappointment in her parents' embellished description of the home, because although it is an improvement, within the grander scheme of Mango Street, it is still ordinary, if not sub-standard in Esperanza's eyes: "But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all" (4).

Since Esperanza is not at all ordinary, she believes that the home misrepresents her whose self-perception represents a transcendental aberration from the norm: "It's small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath" (4). In this line Esperanza's disappointment in the home has everything to do with its symbolic silence that has been instilled and perpetuated by the culture. The small windows holding their breath represents limited opportunities for freedom of expression:

Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in. There is no front yard, only four little elms the city planted by the curb. Out back is a small garage for the car we don't own yet and a small yard that looks smaller between the two buildings on either side. There are stairs in our house, but they're ordinary hallway stairs, and the house has only one washroom. Everybody has to share a bedroom-Mama and Papa, Carlos and Kiki, me and Nenny. (4)

Since the house represents a muffled voice, which ultimately repulses Esperanza, it seems that the reset of the house, which communicates a cramped living situation, simply cramps her style. Esperanza's dream home speaks of a living situation that reflects the complete opposite, and, as opposed to cramping her style, it is simply circumscribed by her whim. According to de Valdes, "The symbolic level of the image of the house is the most basic expression of existence. Everything about the house on Mango Street repels the lyric narrator. This house is not hers and does not reflect her presence." In fact, to emphasize how influential her pillar-to-post experience has been in helping her define what she will *not settle for*, "A House of My Own" reveals Esperanza initially describing the house of her dreams in terms of a negation of what has been: "Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's" (100). This followed by its attributes: "A house all my own. With my porch and my pillow, my pretty purple petunias. My books and my stories. My two shoes waiting beside the bed" (100). It finally concludes, "Nobody to shake a stick at. Nobody's garbage to pick up after" (100). The problem is that Esperanza is part of the House on Mango Street. To deny it compromises her identity. She belongs to a world that is not hers, but

an opposition that will not be resolved in a synthesis or a compromise. The metaphor of a place of her own draws upon the continuing tensional opposition. She learns not only to survive but also to win her freedom, and the text itself with its title and its search for the promised house is the creative tension of poetry. The semantic impertinence of belonging and not belonging creates the metaphorical meaning of identity as one who does not forget to reach and to reach and whose only reason is to "be and be." (de Valdes 68)

Esperanza uses the written word to re-create her vision of the home that is discombobulated by the perpetual reality of a dream-deferred.

**Magdalena Cordero**, otherwise known as **Nenny**, is Esperanza's younger sister. Esperanza sees her little sister as childish and subsequently unable to understand the world as she does: "Nenny is too young to be my friend. She is just my sister, and that was not my fault. You don't pick your sisters, you just get them and sometimes they come like Nenny" (5). However, because the two girls have brothers, Esperanza understands that Nenny is her personal responsibility to guide and protect. Esperanza and Nenny share common bonds both as sisters and as Chicana females. In the story "Laughter," a neighborhood house reminds both sisters of Mexico, a connection possible only because of their shared experience: Nenny says, "Yes, that's Mexico all right. That's what I'm thinking exactly" (21). Esperanza expresses the physical differences between herself and Nenny, with the opinion that Nenny is prettier than she is.

I am an ugly daughter. I am the one nobody comes for.

Nenny says she won't wait her whole life for a husband to come and get her, that Minerva's sister left her mother's house by having a baby, but she doesn't want to go that way either. She wants things all her own, to pick and choose. Nenny has pretty eyes, and it is easy to talk that way if you are pretty. (109)

Nenny's beauty may be a virtue in the movies, but it is her vice in the context of the neighborhood, as it may relegate her to more male attention on Mango Street that may result in premature curiosity, marriage, children, the abortion of great potential beyond the neighborhood. Nenny is a hero in her own right however, because as the younger sister who Esperanza has to drag around with herself and friends, she is often obliviously wise to the immature idiosyncrasies that Esperanza and her friends get caught up in.

In "And Some More," a conversation that begins between Esperanza and her friends about clouds turns into a shouting match in which Esperanza and her friends attack each other's character. Nenny is in her own world as Esperanza and her friends try to battle for her allegiance to her side, her friends trying to force Nenny to say things against Esperanza, and Esperanza holding their sisterhood over her head to take her side. Nenny, who gets caught up in her imaginary game of giving each cloud human names, has the last word when she takes center stage and lightly asserts that they all are "stupid." Nenny wisely exposes the futility of their bickering, and shuts it down.

**Mama Cordero** typifies the women in Latin American communities whose lives are defined by marriage, family, children, and traditionally female activities. Mama reveals herself as a superstitious figure that tells Esperanza that she was born on an evil day and that she will pray for her. Mama functions as the authority figure and caretaker over her household, and is portrayed as a martyr, sacrificing her own needs for the needs of her family: "I could have been somebody, you know?" (111). Mama explains to Esperanza in *A Smart Cookie* that she left school because she was ashamed that she didn't have nice clothes.

Mama wishes for her daughters to have a more fulfilling life outside the cycle of subjugation that characterizes her own, and she views education as the key that opens that vaulted door leading out of that way of life. Very few women have ever held it on Mango Street. Mama is a hero because she is woman enough to admit her mistakes and let down her pride so that she can use her life as an example of what Esperanza should **NOT** do.

"**Alicia Who Sees Mice**" is a young woman burdened by taking care of her family while attending college in order to escape her way of life. It is in this sacrifice and desire to make a difference in her life and that of her family through education that Alicia's heroism lies. In the *barrio*, otherwise known as a Latino ghetto, she is only afraid of mice, which serve as a metaphor for her poverty (NFS).



**Cathy**, “Queen of Cats,” as Esperanza calls her because of her motley collection of felines, is one of Esperanza’s neighborhood playmates. Cathy tells Esperanza that she and her family are leaving because the neighborhood into which Esperanza has just moved is depreciating in value because of the overwhelming amount of working class Latino families taking over.

**Elenita**, the “witch woman” who tells fortunes with the help of religious icons, tarot cards, and other accoutrements, tells Esperanza after reading her cards that she sees a “home in the heart.” This is an anti-climactic prophecy for Esperanza because it eclipses her anticipation of a “real house” appearing in her future.

**Lucy** is a neighborhood girl whom Esperanza befriends even though her clothes “are crooked and old.” Lucy and her sister Rachel are among the first friends Esperanza makes when she moves onto Mango Street.

**Rachel** is Lucy’s sister, a sassy girl according to Esperanza. Esperanza and Rachel parade around the neighborhood in high heel shoes with her in the story “The Family of Little Feet.”

**Rafaela** stays indoors and observes the world from her windowsill, “because her husband is afraid Rafaela will run away since she is too beautiful to look at” (79). Rafaela symbolizes the interior world of the women on Mango Street, whose lives are circumscribed by the coercive, premature, and often dysfunctional, establishment of home and family.

**Ruthie**, “the only grown-up we know who likes to play” (67), is a troubled, childlike woman whose husband left her and was forced to move from her own house to the suburbs back to Mango Street with her mother.

**Sally** wears grown-up things like black clothes, short skirts, nylons, and make-up. Esperanza looks upon her with fascination and wonder, and wants to emulate her, but the dark side of Sally’s life is revealed in her relationship with her abusive father. She trades one type of ensnarement for another by marrying a marshmallow salesman before the eighth grade.

**Rosa Vargas** is a woman left in the lurch by a husband who abandoned her and their unruly kids in “There Was an Old Woman She Had So Many Children She Didn’t Know What to Do.” Esperanza complains that “they are bad those Vargas, and how can they help it with only one mother who is tired all the time from buttoning and bottling and babying, and who cries every day for the man who left without even leaving a dollar for bologna or a note explaining how come” (29).

**The Three Sisters** are Rachel and Lucy’s elderly aunts who come to visit when Rachel and Lucy’s baby sister dies. The three ladies recognize Esperanza’s strong-willed nature, and plead with her not to forget the ones she leaves behind on Mango Street when she flees from there one day. Their gift to Esperanza is the gift of self-identity: “When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can’t erase what you know. You can’t forget who you are” (105).

This vignette is a departure from the others in that it combines the prose-poem quality of the book with an extensive dialogue sequence in which Esperanza relinquishes control of the conversation, and deferentially speaks only when spoken to. The speaking voices are of crucial importance, as through their enunciation they become full participants in the story-telling evocation with Esperanza:

She's special.  
Yes, she'll go very far.  
Yes, yes, hmmm.  
Make a wish.  
A wish?  
Yes, make a wish. What do you want?  
Anything? I said.  
Well, why not?  
I closed my eyes.  
Did you wish already?  
Yes, I said.  
Well, that's all there is to it. It'll come true.  
How do you know? I asked.  
We know, we know. (Cisneros 105)

The sisters symbolize Esperanza's revelation of self, and subsequent purpose. They function as the narrative mediators who enter the story to facilitate the heroine's rite of passage and the incumbent life challenges that lie ahead for a woman whose destiny is to turn the world upside down:

At the level of plot the sisters serve as revelation. They are the narrative mediators that enter the story, at the crucial junctures, to assist the heroine in the trial that lies ahead. It is significant that they are from Mexico and appear only to be related to the moon. In pre-Hispanic Mexico, the lunar goddesses, such as Tlazolteotl and Xochiquetzal, were the intermediaries for all women. They are sisters to each other and, as women, sisters to Esperanza. One has laughter like tin, another has the eyes of a cat, and the third hands like porcelain. This image is, above all, a lyrical disclosure of revelation. Their entrance into the story is almost magical: "They came with the wind that blows in August, thin as a spider web and barely noticed [96]," for they came only to make the gift to Esperanza of her selfhood. At the symbolic level, the three sisters are linked with Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos, the three fates. Catullus depicts them weaving their fine web of destiny: "Three sisters pealed their high prophetic song,/Song which no length of days shall prove untrue" [173]. The tradition of the sisters of fate runs deep in Western literature from the most elevated lyric to the popular tale of marriage, birth, and the fate awaiting the hero or heroine. In Cisneros's text, the prophecy of the fates turns to the evocation of self-knowledge. (de Valdés 65)

The three sisters are heroic in that they come in at crucial junctures to assist in trials that lie ahead. They came to help ease the pain of Lucy and Rachel's baby sister dying prematurely, and they came for the purpose of helping Esperanza understand the weighty implications of her existence. It is no wonder that they adorn the front page of text, almost as keys to a kingdom of self-revelation for all who encounter this life-altering work. It is their mysticism and spirituality that serve to speak a permissive word into Esperanza's life, releasing her gifts to flourish while reminding her not to forget to remember.

## **CULTIVATING STUDENT KNOWLEDGE PERSONALLY AND INTELLECTUALLY**

This curriculum unit will benefit my students academically because it will:

- a. Enable them to attain an intimacy with literature through physical and psychological experimentation necessitated by the vulnerable process of oral interpretation
- b. Engage in the writing process of scripting a piece of literature
- c. Allow them to make independent and/or collaborative choices as they write, direct, and produce themselves in a performance reflecting their interpretation of a literary work.

Ultimately, this approach will enable them to assume ownership of the work through the process of writing, directing, producing and performing the work. This process empowers the students to engage in an interdisciplinary approach to performance that will strengthen their understanding of appreciating literature. Moreover, this approach will strengthen their ability to read, write, and celebrate literature through the process of exploration and critical analyses. Ultimately, they will achieve a mature understanding of the literature by attaining oneness with the work through performative embodiment. They will have a vested interest in the work to engage in this process because the content of the literature is applicable to multiple dispensations of everyday life and culture. The work's applicability to their lives will cultivate the academic skills of reading, writing and critical analysis through the license they will have to take ownership of the literature and make it their own.

### **Student Assignments and Teaching Strategies**

Some of the teaching strategies I will use are modeling, corporate read-throughs, cooperative reviews, and jigsaw, which entail an in-depth character analysis, improvisation, and question and answer session.

#### ***Modeling***

To clearly articulate what we want our students to do, teachers exercise the strategy called modeling. The idea is if we want our students to do something according to our instructions without misunderstanding us, we must place ourselves on the line to present an example of what we expect from them. I will perform one of the monologues, so they will be able to accurately measure the standard of excellence I have set for them.

### ***Read-Through***

I will conduct a corporate read-through of all the literary vignettes in the book. We will sit in a circle, and I will require all students to take part in reading a segment of the book. When each group is assigned a story to dissect, they will repeat the read-through process only for the story they have been assigned. Multiple read-throughs are helpful for the same reasons seeing the same movie multiple times is helpful. With each perusal, you notice something you didn't notice before. More intimacy with the text allows for deeper analysis of the work.

### ***Jigsaw***

To jigsaw an assignment means to divide an assignment up into smaller parts, and assign each part to the smaller groups within the larger context of the class, and/or to each person within the smaller group. I will jigsaw each vignette, assigning one to each group, in which they must engage in a **cooperative learning project**.

### ***Cooperative Learning***

Cooperative learning is a sophisticated way of jig-sawing an assignment. Cooperative learning requires higher order thinking skills, because it is engaging in a more intimate analysis of the work based on what we already know about it. Cooperative learning always happens within a small group, where the analyses will not be complete without each member of that group doing the part they were assigned to. Cooperative learning is different from group work, in that in the cooperative learning exercise, each member is responsible for a specific thing, whereas in group work the entire group is assigned a piece of a larger project without anyone in the group being assigned anything to specifically assume responsibility for. Ultimately, with group work, there is always the danger of someone not doing their part. And because the teacher himself has not assigned clearly defined roles for each person within the group, the entire group is forced to assume accountability for that person's failure to contribute.

The cooperative learning activity requires no more, and no less, than four people to a group. Each student will have an opportunity to read, summarize, praise and critique the work, furnishing what they would like to have heard more of. They will then enhance the work based on what they believe to be missing, or what they wish to add. This will inspire the subject matter for their rehearsed improvisation.

### ***Question and Answer***

I will invite Cisneros herself and other women who are connected to the book to the school for a tour, and to entertain a question and answer session where the students are able to ask informed questions about the story from the source.

### ***Improvisation***

Students will be allowed 7-13 minutes to plan an improvisation that will alter the beginning or end of the work.

### ***Brainstorming***

Students will again come up with various ideas surrounding the personalities of each of the ladies in the work who are the subjects of their own stories, either told by themselves or Esperanza.

### ***Debate***

Since the plight or fate of many of the subjects is ambiguous, I will enable my students to wage well-researched debates in favor of one side or the other. These debates should display the students' mastery over the text, as what they gather from the text will justify their conclusions.

### ***Bi-Tri-furcated Self, Duo role Playing (Chamber Theatre)***

To my advanced students, I will also introduce the idea of the bi-furcated and tri-furcated self, modeling it with Denzel Washington's movie *The Hurricane* and the Bruce Willis' movie *The Kid*. The bifurcated and trifurcated self is the self from either two or three different *points of view*, respectively. I will also introduce the duo and triple role playing (Chamber theatre) that the students will be able to use in order to perform multiple roles, and manipulating those roles to unfold a story, or share a different perspective.

### ***What's in a name?***

The students will investigate the meaning behind the names of each of the protagonists in the work. They will then explore if and how these names apply to their personalities and temperament. I will then have them do this same investigation behind their names, and see at what points they connect with the name of the character they plan to perform, and what aspects of their personality do not match. They will then share how they will use those traits that are not in common to master their interpretation of the role they have been assigned.

## LESSON PLANS: SANDRA CISNEROS AND *THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET*—THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

### Lesson One: Sandra Cisneros, The Potter

Lesson Time: 3 days

#### Day 1

##### *Anticipatory Set-Focus*

Give an autobiographical sketch of Sandra Cisneros. View video footage on Sandra Cisneros, and anything applicable to an enhanced understanding of the work. Have students discuss their impression of the work.

Explain that *The House on Mango Street* is a book composed of literary sketches, or vignettes, which are all related yet able to function independently as a short story while still being cohesive. Also introduce Esperanza as the major protagonist in the work, while her friends wear the hats of minor protagonists, and in interaction with her, antagonists.

##### *Guided Practice*

Have students discuss in their groups what heroism is to them.

##### *Independent Practice*

Have students begin to create a working definition of what it means to be a hero within their groups. Afterwards we will come together to create descriptive words that will begin a working definition of heroism.

##### *Closure/Homework*

Have students finish with journaling, and open floor to final reflections. Ask students to write journal entries of no more than a full page of who their hero is and why. It can be a creative expression in the form of a poem, picture, etc.

#### Day Two

##### *Teacher Prep*

Have approximately seven songs about heroes of different races and cultures.

##### *Anticipatory Set/Focus*

Have students briefly share who their heroes are within their groups, and why. Have students choose one student's disclosure to present to the rest of the class.

##### *Lesson*

Bring this into the group as a whole, and have chosen students share.

### *Guided Practice*

Incorporate what the students shared about who their heroes were and why into the working definition of what a hero is.

### *Independent Practice*

Have students come up with a new working definition of hero, based on the representative sampling of contributions from their peers. Assign each group of students one thing they need to find out about Cisneros for homework.

### *Closure*

Have students finish with journaling, and open floor to final reflections.

## **Day Three**

### *Anticipatory Set/Focus*

Have students listen to an assigned song about heroism and process within their groups what that song means to them. They will then come back to the larger class, and each group will share their ideas when it comes to a given song.

### *Guided Practice*

Share with students their responsibility to process their research about a certain aspect of Cisneros within their groups, and decide what aspects of that accomplishment they feel to be heroic, and which ones are not. Every opinion must be supported. They must then share this information with the rest of the class and open the floor to their input.

### *Independent Practice*

Have students sit in their groups and share, and then come back to the group and share corporately.

### *Closure*

Have students finish with journaling, and open floor to final reflections

## **Lesson Two: The House on Mango Street: The Clay**

Lesson Duration: 4 Days

### *Objective*

Students will develop an intimacy with *The House on Mango Street* through a corporate read-through and in-depth analysis.

### *Teacher Prep*

Furnish one set of the English version of *The House on Mango Street* and one Spanish version.

### *Anticipatory Set/Focus*

Ask students to peruse the titles and choose one that resonates. They must be prepared to share why it resonates, and what they believe the story may be about.

### **Days One-Four**

Engage in a corporate read-through of ¼ work, in Spanish and in English. As we read each vignette, we will interact about the work as a corporate body.

#### ***Independent Practice***

Have each conduct a literary analysis of each story, and then choose to improvise a new beginning or end to the story, based on what they believe they would like to see in the work. Have students present their improvisation to the rest of the group.

#### ***Closure***

Have students finish with journaling, and open floor to final reflections.

### **Lesson Three**

#### ***Teacher Prep***

Create a sheet that asks questions, and prescribe a way to establish intimacy with a character through analysis.

#### ***Anticipatory Set/Focus***

Have students choose three people/points of view they would be interested in performing.

#### ***Guided Practice***

Have students conduct a character analysis of the three people and/or points of view they would like to perform. The person chosen must either be the speaking subject of a vignette, the speaker in the work who speaks of someone else, and a non-speaking subject of a work. Clarify that the person may also want to perform different points of view from the same person. Since *Mango Street* reflects Esperanza's journey into selfhood, the person of Esperanza in the beginning of the story is not the same as the Esperanza at the end, and then there are a substantial amount of Esperanza's in between. With every experience, which is represented with each story in which she is the speaking subject, a different point of view is reflected. Therefore, each person may want to audition for Esperanza from three differing points of view, as represented by three different stories.

#### ***Independent Practice***

Character Analysis: The requirement is that each student chooses three different kinds of characters in the work for the purpose of character analysis and auditioning: Speaking subject speaking about the self; Speaking subject, speaking about another; non-speaking subject, whose non-verbal actions represent their traits. How and why is each of these subjects heroic? Have them to then liken the character to someone they know, and for homework, have them interview the person that the character reminds them of. Have them choose and then share within their groups. At this point, I will give them the stipulations for auditions as well as audition pieces and improvisations. Each student will be required to audition for a grade, whether or not they choose to perform in the Fall program.



After students are assigned the vignette in which they will perform, have them write a review of the piece, which will entail identifying the protagonist and antagonist(s) of the work, point of view, perspective, character analysis, the heroic characteristics they possess, and how this helps them reconceptualize the meaning of “hero,” character relationships, plot summary of the work, and why the work left a particular impression on them, and guided practice to brainstorm ideas on different ways to script the work. For the strict purpose of a grade, outside of the Fall performance, multiple students will be allowed to do the same work, because interpretations of the work will vary.

### ***Closure***

Journaling and final reflections

- Future lessons will include exercises that examine the character traits of the women in the work in their relationship to heroism, and a Sticky note game where they collage one-word descriptions of each of the women on Mango Street, based on their character analysis.

### **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Alarcon, Norma. “The Sardonic Powers of the Erotic in the Work of Anna Castillo.”

*Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993.

Alarcon’s examination of the work of Anna Castillo is helpful in an examination of Cisneros’s work. Notwithstanding the fact that Cisneros’s primary thrust is not overtly social protest, Esperanza’s voice as the primary protagonist and female speaking subject on Mango Street is perceivable as a covert social protest against the silenced voices of women.

Alicia, Juana. “Survivor” (artwork). *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993.

My reading of the “Survivor” painting reveals how the hopes and dreams of the Latino women will not be quenched by the veil of subjugation. Maya Angelou has a poem entitled “And still I rise.” This picture shows that this woman’s eyes are so bright with purpose and destiny, no blindfold can make her lose her focus. As light will seep through any crack or crevice to reveal itself, so it is with this woman’s vision. The light is too overwhelming to be kept under a bushel. Because her vision for her destiny is so strong, it illuminates itself everywhere she goes. This is Esperanza’s story. The inevitability of a transcendent destiny is all over her.

Baca, Judith. “Uprising of the Mujeres.” (artwork) *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993.

The title of the work alone reflects its relationship to Cisneros’s work. The painting reveals women in stances that not only foreground them as subjects, captains of their fate, but their faces look masculine. I interpret the work to reflect women coming out and asserting their role as subjects, not objects, agents of change, and not mere women who respond to the change that has been imposed on them. I also see these women as lionesses, who go to as

many extremes as possible to protect their new found autonomy and mobility. In the picture, it looks as if they are in the very act of protecting this priceless gift.

Busch, Juan-Daniel. "Self-Baptizing the Wicked Esperanza: Chicana Feminism and Cultural Contact in *The House on Mango Street*." *Mester*. Fall 1993 and Spring 1994. Busch exposes how misunderstood the political stances Chicana women have taken are. He shares how people do not recognize that the political stances of Chicanas are a consequence of their self affirmation and recognition and creation of their "active" and "reactive" selves. Chicana action and reaction is illustrated through Esperanza's experiences. Busch explicates how Cisneros's *Mango Street* demonstrates an approach to identity which allows the main character, Esperanza, to manifest the transcendental meaning of the name she was given during the process where she creates a progressive identity. Ultimately, Esperanza balances past and present where she negotiates history and culture; her relationship to both is a fluid and progressive notion of Chicana identity.

Candelaria, Cordelia Chavez. "The 'Wild Zone' Thesis as Gloss in Chicana Literary Study." *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993.

Candelaria foregrounds the Latina challenge that African American women have expressed since the fight for the abolition of slavery, right to vote, and quest for civil rights: their frustration that their membership in an underrepresented race necessitates that their needs go unmet, so that the needs of the race as a whole are met. The only downfall in literature is that their voices are silenced and the only representation of the race that receives attention is that of the male. Unfortunately the subjugation imposed on the underrepresented race is instilled and perpetuated by the male component of that race on the female. Subsequently, what Candelaria identifies as "double," or even "triple jeopardy." The jeopardy of being a member of a subjugated race, and then being a member of the "lesser gender" within the confines of the race is what Candelaria brings to the forefront in this work. This work is beneficial because it shows me how the seemingly self-degrading lifestyles of aborted dreams and self-fulfilling prophecies of hopelessness reflect a dysfunctionality that allow the men of that same race to feel significant in a society where they are considered to be worthless. This worthlessness is only redeemed by the sad consolation that the female component of the race is worse off.

Castaneda, Antonia I. "Presidarias y Pobladoras: The Journey North and Life in Frontier California." Gonzales-Berry, Erlinda. "Unveiling Athena: Women in the Chicano Novel." *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993. This work is helpful for Cisneros's most recent cycle of short stories, *Woman Hollering Creek*, as well as Soto's *Living up the Street*. It ultimately helps me get a more transcendental perspective on the struggles of Latinas on Mango Streets across the nation. Specifically, the work examines the challenges Latina women faced as they settled in California. It facilitates my examination of the correlation between culture and geography

and its implications on female roles as my analysis transcends Cisneros to understand its dynamics in Chicano communities across the nation.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Random House, 1984.

The House on Mango Street serves as the foundational text from which I am loosely defining “she-roes” in the Latino community. This work of literary vignettes illustrates the multi-faceted faces of women who have reflected heroism within the contextual confines of a subversive, male dominated Chicano ghetto, or “barrio.” The work features Esperanza as the most clearly defined “she-ro” in her assumption of ownership not only of her mind and body, but of her destiny. The other females in the work are defined as heroines for their ability to conquer at least one of the three elements of their lives, or simply for their ability to endure their current situations, many of which being self-inflicted, with tenacity, courage, or stoicism.

Cruz, Felicia J. “On the ‘Simplicity’ of Sandra Cisneros’s *House on Mango Street*.” *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 47 (Winter 2001): 910-45.

Cruz documents the journey *The House on Mango Street* has taken as an exclusively Chicano literature to eventually become a work that has become part of the American literary canon. Cruz accounts for Mango Street’s matriculation through college campuses to warn against underestimating the work as anything other than a literary gem, whose seemingly simplistic language communicates a political undertone that deals with the deep-seated issues that affect Chicano women and concern Cisneros.

Davis, Rocio G. “Identity in Community in Ethnic Short Story Cycles: Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, Louise Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*, Gloria Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place*.” *Ethnicity and the American Short Story*. Ed. Julie Brown. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.

While this article does not mention Cisneros’s work, the motive behind the form she uses is best explicated through the pioneers of this particular new genre called the short story cycle. The need for a new genre that accounts for the underrepresented races in its recognition of the dynamics of what W.E.B. Dubois calls the “double consciousness,” and how it manifests in literature is paramount.

The complicated process of selfhood and the inescapable doubleness of the between-world subject is the covert theme in much of this ethnic fiction, as the writers question what it is that determines both identity and community, signaling how geographical, ethnic, political, and cultural makeup and differences serve as signifying aspects to this complex self. The recreation of this intricate self in fiction has, increasingly enough, brought about the development and expansion of a literary genre that has proven itself particularly suited to the task of articulating and elaborating its distinctiveness. A survey of ethnic fiction in the United States demonstrates a proliferation of the short story cycle, a hybrid form whose roots are in the western tradition, which many of the principle ethnic writers have adapted and perfected as a tool through which they enact their dramas (3).

This work is also applicable to Cisneros's work in its clear description of the characteristics of the work as it defines the short story cycle as a set of stories linked to each other in such a way as to maintain a balance between the individuality of each of the stories and the necessities of the larger unit... (so) that the reader's successive experience in various levels of the pattern of the whole significantly modifies his experience of each of its component parts (15, 19). This article ultimately explores the theory of the short story cycle as a vehicle for the development of ethnic fiction.

de la Torre, Adela. "Key Issues in Latina Health: Voicing Latina Concerns in the Health Financing Debate." *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993. 157-168.

De la Torre identifies Mexican-Americans as not only under the Latino umbrella, but also as the group that makes up the largest percentage of the Latino population. Over sixty percent of Latinos in the U.S. are of Mexican origin. Furthermore, it reveals how Latinas have been disproportionately affected by the political backlash of decisions that inflict negative consequences on the Latino community at large. This article helps me to understand outside circumstances that perpetuate the subjugation that Mexican-American women face, particularly when it comes to healthcare. Simultaneously, it helps me to recognize the weightiness of Esperanza's and the rest of the female subjects of *Mango Street* as heroines, for things that seemingly may not be heroic. The circumstances alone helps me to modify the mainstream standards for heroism and particularize them for this particular race of women because of the challenges they face within the confines of an oppressive culture within the confines of an oppressive nation.

De Valdés Maria Elena. "In Search of Identity in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*." *Canadian Review of American Studies*. Fall 1992: 55+

This work supports my conviction of how the literary work of Cisneros is fueled by the reciprocal interaction between the written and spoken word. It celebrates its' uniqueness as a multi-gendered text, while foregrounding implications of Esperanza's potency as a first-person, fully major protagonist in juxtaposition with the women she speaks of whose voicelessness is symbolic of their stagnation.

Flores-Ortiz, Yvette. "La Mujer y La Violencia: A Culturally Based Model for the Understanding and Treatment of Domestic Violence in Chicana/Latina Communities." *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993.

Flores-Ortiz provides an all inclusive definition of domestic violence to be the use of anger and intimidation, threats and humiliation, isolation and restriction of freedom, abuse of male privilege, use of children to control the actions of women, sexual, economic, and emotional and moral abuse. At the root of this exploitation is the man's need for power. Latino families must deal with a plethora of complexly interactive experiences that potentially contribute to family violence. These experiences include, but are not limited to, migration, acculturation, under-employment, under-education, and economic stress. Furthermore, the lasting impact of colonization in their countries of origin and neo-colonization in the United States often creates what Flores-Ortiz articulates as a "victim

system,” which creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of suffering and exploitation. This end is super-imposed on Latinas by patriarchal and religious influences. This article is important for my research because it provides clarity for why many of the women featured on Mango street seem to be pre-disposed to a compromised lifestyle, which eclipses their significance as individual thinkers and agents of change in juxtaposition with their male counterparts.

Gibbon, Peter. “Heroes for Our Age: How Heroes Can Elevate Students’ Lives.” *American Educator*. Winter 2002: 8-15, 46-8.

This article is helpful in helping to establish practical ways to help students to conceptualize an attainable meaning for heroism.

Gonzales-Berry, Erlinda. “Unveiling Athena: Women in the Chicano Novel.” *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993. 33-44. *Si has puedo cambiar tu destino recuerda un poquito quien te hizo mujer*.

(Popular Mexican song)

In English, the above translates as, “If you have been thinking of changing your destiny, just remember a little bit who made you woman.” Gonzales-Berry investigates the symbols that signify what a woman is, aborting the true substance of women, ultimately typifying them as opposed to recognizing them as fearfully and wonderfully complex individuals. Gonzales-Berry discloses how commonplace to acknowledge that this symbolic displacement has “confused women, setting them astray in their own quest for self-definition and, more often than not, keeping them in their place, that is, in the niche designated for them by the creators of cultural and symbolic paradigms” (34). The symbols that have served to displace the substance and individuality of every woman is that of the *virgin, mother, and whore*. In the Chicano novel, Gonzales-Berry examines the three stages of development in the portrayal of women in the Chicano novel:

1. Chicana characters cast as types-virgin/mother/whore roles
2. Chicana characters hidden behind the mask of femininity, cast as the “Other” of male protagonists
3. Chicanas cast as unveiled Athenas of characters of multiple dimensions.

This article is helpful as I continue to unfold the weightiness of Esperanza’s voice as she establishes herself and uses the observational innuendo she asserts as an innocent young girl, reestablishing the women on Mango Street in terms of what they are, do, or feel, and displacing the pervasive sign, which has gained a more powerful reality in discourse about women.

Govea, Catalina. “Las Tres Marias.” *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993.

This photo and its title reminds me of the vignette “There Was an Old Woman, she had so many Children She didn’t Know What to Do.” The title of this photo reflects the idea that this woman had so many children that she may have named three of her daughters “Maria.” It presents a larger commentary on the culture of Catholicism that mandates no abortion, and may even seem to challenge its tenets because of the plight of the Old woman who

“cries everyday for the man who left without even leaving a dollar for bologna or a note explaining how come (Mango, 29).

Griffin, Susan E. “Resistance and Reinvention in Sandra Cisneros’ *Woman Hollering Creek*.” *Ethnicity and the American Short Story*. Ed. Julie Brown. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.

Griffin theorizes ways in which Cisneros uses the short story as a vehicle to empower Mexican-American women to rewrite traditional narratives without relinquishing their culture. She asserts that Mexican-American narratives involving women marginalize them by relegating them to fall prey to identification with the Virgin Mary, an iconographic familial figure, or Malinche, a figure in Mexican culture associated with lust, selfishness, and the betrayal of her race. The limitation to a coerced allegiance to either component of this dichotomous relationship, which has been exacerbated by the media, is what Cisneros desires to subvert. Esperanza would be most closely associated with Malinche, however, to simplify her, or the other women in the *House on Mango Street* would be a dire disservice. In my exploration of the dynamics of female identity, and how it is marketed in Mexican American literature, society, and the world, this article is quite enlightening.

Gutierrez-Spencer, Laura. “Fairy Tales and Opera: The Fate of the Heroine in the Work of Sandra Cisneros.” *Speaking the Other Self: American Women Writers* Ed. Jeanne Campbell-Reesman. University of Georgia Press, 1997.

This work examines how Cisneros uses the tragic heroines in fiction and fairytales to reveal the likeness of the female characters in her work. In the *House on Mango Street*, Esperanza’s self-defiant disposition is identified with ill-fated opera heroine, Carmen the gypsy, Carmen the damned. In her comparison of Esperanza’s audacious coming-out monologue as a young woman in charge of her destiny in “Beautiful and Cruel,” Laura Gutierrez Spencer proposes Carmen to be an operatic manifestation of Cisneros’s “one with red, red lips,” for Carmen “drives the men crazy and laughs them all away. Carmen is a figure paradox. The mere fact that she is a woman who acts like a man proves it, for within the symbolic order the male occupies a position of active supremacy over the passivity of the female. To oppose that order is to invite disaster. Yet, what else could Carmen do? What Cisneros does not mention in Beautiful and Cruel” is that according to the patriarchal literary tradition, the powerful and defiant female figure is inevitably punished for her audacity. That hierarchical structure upon which patriarchal societies are based cannot allow this carnivalesque figure to upset the social apple cart in which men are allowed more power and choices than women (282).”

Jablon, Madelyn. “Womanist Storytelling: The Voice of the Vernacular.” *Ethnicity and the American Short Story*. Ed. Julie Brown. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.

*Today. My simple passion is to write our names in history and walk in the light that is woman.*

-Sonia Sanchez, *Poem*

The applicability of Cisneros’s work is proven by the quote that makes this article inclusive of Latina women. The “universal” definition of feminism was only designed to include

white women. While the article directly addresses the vernacular language of black female writers, the idea of “womanist” is inclusive of Latina women as well. A womanist point of view of Zora Neale Hurston’s Janie in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, and Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street*, would converge in that the mere act of both protagonists telling their own stories is the culmination of empowerment.

Kelley, Margot. “A Minor Revolution: Chicano/a Composite Novels and the Limits of Genre.” *Ethnicity and the American Short Story*. Ed. Julie Brown. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.

*Where do genres come from? Quite simply from other genres. A new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or of several: by inversion, by displacement, by combination...it is a system in constant transformation.*

-Tzvetan Todorov

Cisneros’s *House on Mango Street* reflects a new genre, which Margot Kelley identifies as the *composite novel*. The composite novel is a hybrid of the novel and short story. Literary scholars have never wanted to limit Cisneros’s creativity by relegating it to one genre, so they often attempt to articulately identify it by descriptors, as opposed to a category. Ultimately, Cisneros’s work is helplessly yet reverently described as “poetic lyricism,” or “rhythmic poetry in the form of literary vignettes,” and the like. The *composite novel* trait is identifiable in all of Cisneros’s work, as each short story functions independently within the larger realm of the work. Each work is related, and carries the same motif. This motif is the tie that interrelates them all. The work is beneficial to me in my quest to identify the work as accurately as possible, and examining the design of the work as a metaphor for interdependence of the female community on Mango Street. What one does not have, all components coming together to create an explosive statement. The uniqueness of each woman makes up the authentic and reflective mystique of *Mango Street*, just as the uniqueness of each story contributes to this masterful body of literary work dispensing with boundaries, and establishing itself as a new genre in its own right.

Mullen, Bill. “Marking/Marketing Race: African American Short Stories and the Politics of Genre, 1933-1946.” *Ethnicity and the American Short Story*. Ed. Julie Brown. New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.

Mullen asserts how the short story was used to fabricate stereotypes about underrepresented races: Last, and most heinous of race offenders, was the short story. This genre, in the board’s scathing estimate, “uses most stereotypes, and is the worst offender (260)” of black and non-white sensibility. Mullen discusses how the short story, written for, by, and about underrepresented people of the same race have transformed the short story into a vehicle for empowerment. *The House on Mango Street* reveals Cisneros as one of those change agents.

*Novels for Students: Presenting Analyses, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Novels*. Ed. Sara Constanttakis et al. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 1997-2002. 113-133.

This literary supplement provides readers with a guide to studying, understanding, and ultimately enjoying novels by enabling them to easily access information about the work.

The NFS supplemental series is designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students, teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers of specific novels. While each volume contains entries on “classic” or novels that have gained membership the literary cannon, there are also supplemental materials with information on contemporary novels, which are inclusive of works by multicultural, international, and women novelists. Information covered in each entry includes and introduction to the novel and its author, a plot summary, character analyses and relationships, important themes of motifs that thread through a collective work, and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements in the work that may or may not be exclusive to the author.

Pérez, Emma. “Sexuality and Discourse: Notes From a Chicana Survivor.” *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993. 45-71.

This essay functions to do three things:

1. Reevaluate the Oedipal movement when men recognize they have sociosexual power, while speculating on how Chicano males ambivalently hold that power.
2. Assess “the molestation memory,” or “memory of origin,” when girls recognize they do not have socio-sexual power in relation to men.
3. After establishing a dichotomous relationship between male power and female powerlessness, the essay responds by asserting female power by analyzing how Chicanas seize sociosexual power that creates their own *sitio y lengua*, sight/vision and language. Moreover the work moves from deconstructing male centralist theory about women to reconstructing and affirming a Chicana space and language in an antagonistic society.

Pesquera, Beatriz M. and Denise M. Segura. “There Is No Going Back: Chicanas and Feminism.” *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993.

This article was a response to the need to recognize the Chicanas’ exclusion from the ideas and movements that feminism represents because of the presupposition of socialized apathy. Because as black women have used the womanist ideal to re-define the feminist movement, which was never intended to benefit them, Pesquera and Segura saw the need to highlight how Latina women have galvanized themselves to customize the feminist ideals to fits their needs as members of the then-second, now first largest and most subjugated ethnic group in the United States. The article explores feminism among two groups of Chicanas; 101 members of a group of Chicanas in higher education, and 152 Chicana white collar workers. This article is beneficial because it allows me to examine more deeply the journey of Cisneros, who is a scholar, as well as what many believe to be a memoir of the pivotal stage in her life which helped to mark her destiny as different, special, set apart. I believe Cisneros, who identifies herself as “nobody’s mother, and nobody’s wife (Mango 111),” to be, and has painted a picture of fictitiously autobiographical Esperanza to be, a feminist.



*Selena*. Directed by Gregory Nava Warner Studios, 1997.

The nuts and bolts of the irresistibly danceable music called Tejano are pop, rock, polka, R&B and Latin influences. To millions of fans there's another vital ingredient; the dynamic singer Selena. Vibrant songstress, *Selena* is the story of Grammy Award-winning South Texas singer whose life tragically ended just as she was taking Tejano music where it had never gone – into mainstream America. The film recreates the early life of a little girl who dreamed big, hit the road in the band bus named Big Bertha and whose concerts became electrifying events. Selena is applicable to this work because Selena and Esperanza have much of the same things in common: They both dream of futures that their culture does not support, yet the people, especially the women need: "My dream is the same dream as all those people in the audience. It's like all their hopes are centered on me. I feel so lucky! (Selena)."

Esperanza and Selena have much in common. Both are Mexican American, and both have ambitions to leave and give back to their communities while being ambassadors to the rest of the nation. While the inevitability of leaving Mango Street represents cross over for Esperanza, Creating her all English album and the dream deferred of singing at Disneyland, a landmark that epitomizes America, represents the crossover that Selena hoped for. Selena's confidence of acceptance in Mexico, notwithstanding acculturation, will be the same challenge Esperanza will conquer as well, because her crossover will be the very thing that will make Mexico proud that she represents them. The power and influence she gains from the crossover will enable her to pour substantially into the lives of her people.

While Esperanza dreams, Selena manifests. What differentiates Selena from Esperanza is that other women push Esperanza to her destiny, while ironically, Selena's Dad is her cheerleader. The coercive limitations on the potential of Latina women were instilled and perpetuated by Selena's mother, who tried to impose these beliefs on the prospects of Selena's future:

Mother:           What are we doing? What are we doing to our kids?  
Selena is just a little girl. Even if she keeps singing, she's a woman.  
Women don't make it in this business.

Father:           Maricella, I understand everything you are saying. But she is  
special. She's got it I can feel it I know it! She's gonna make it. You  
guys are gonna make it. You're going to record records, you're  
going to sing everywhere, even Disney World. If you try hard, and  
you really want it, you can do it. Do you believe me? Yeah Dad, I  
believe you. (Mother begins to relent and teach Selena Cumbia  
dancing, which immediately gets incorporated into her routine.

Another scene features Selena gathering a good crowd for a performance, and the sexism which occurs within the Latino community when the entertainment manager cheats her out

of a pre-determined amount of money, the only justification being she is of the female persuasion:

Father: Six-hundred twenty dollars, Juan Luis, this is not what we talked about. This is not what we discussed. These people came here for a reason. They came here to see Selena. They love Selena.  
Manager: What can I say, Abraham? She's just a woman!

Sosa Riddell, Adaljiza. "The Bioethics of Reproductive Technologies: Impacts and Implications for Latinas." *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993.

This article opens the debates on issues surrounding reproductive technologies, such as surrogate motherhood, and frozen embryos, to the concerns of Chicanas/Latinas, to inform Chicanas/Latinas as well as other women about major issues involved, to encourage Chicana/Latina scholars to contribute to the debates on reproductive technologies through intensive research, and to encourage all Chicanas/Latinas to engage constructively in current debates over the development of new technologies. This galvanization of Latina/Chicana scholarly involvement and otherwise is a response to the absence of women of color in general and Latinas in particular when it comes to issues of women's hearts, minds, and bodies.

Soto, Gary. *Living Up the Street*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1985.

"We were terrible kids, I think (1)," says Gary Soto in *Being Mean*, the first of twenty-one literary snapshots in the form of a short story. Like Cisneros' creation of Esperanza primary protagonist, the pre-pubescent Soto himself is the male authoritative voice, relating experiences primarily through his eyes. This book will function as the male component to *The House on Mango Street*. The motif of the "street," and the street representing the neighborhood and the experiences it yields serves as the tie that binds both texts, and subsequent commonalities and differences that yield a forum for the achievement for the on-going exploration and establishment of self-identity.

Trujillo, Carla. "Chicana Lesbians: Fear and Loathing in the Chicano Community." *Chicana Critical Issues*, Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993.

Zavella, Patricia. "The Politics of Race and Gender: Organizing Chicana Cannery Workers in Northern California." *Chicana Critical Issues*. Ed. Norma Alarcon et al. Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1993.

This article is helpful in its recognition of the inequitable treatment Latina women receive because of their position as the "recessive gender" within the confines of a "recessive race."