



The Evolution of the Meaning of Home in The House on Mango Street

Curriculum Unit 26.02.04, published September 2026
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To understand the concept of home, I need to clarify and define what the word means in reference to the curriculum unit I am writing. Home is a deeply personal and meaningful word for many people. A home is defined as a place where a person or family lives, offering a sense of refuge, belonging, and comfort. A home carries emotional weight. It differs from the definition of a house that refers to the physical building, a structure that serves to protect its dwellers from the elements. ¹

It is also important to know the student population that exists in the district. In New Haven, Connecticut, we serve a large minority population. The student body consists of over 18,000 students. 9.8% of the student population is white. 33.1% black, 3.9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 49.3% Latino, and .2% American Indian or Alaska Native. In addition, we have 3.5% of students who have identified two or more races.² It is difficult to determine how many of these students are migrants, immigrants, or transplants, but it does tell us that we are dealing with a culturally diverse population.

Cultural diversity has a lot to do with the sense and feeling of "home." It is closely connected to how people understand and experience home. Cultural background shapes the traditions, languages, memories, values, and family expectations that give a place emotional meaning. For students shaped by migration, home may be connected not only to a current residence but also to ancestral roots, community ties, and inherited cultural identity.

Scholars have argued that cultural identity and belonging are central to the meaning of home. As Avtar Brah explains, home is both a lived locality and a broader sense of belonging shaped by histories of diaspora, identity, and location.³ This perspective helps explain why home cannot be understood as only a physical space, especially in communities marked by cultural diversity and migration.

New Haven is a sanctuary city and many of our students come to New Haven from somewhere else. Some families immigrate by choice, and others are forced by circumstances to immigrate to a place that differs from their homeland. While many students are native to New Haven, a sizable portion are immigrants who come from other countries or they are transplants. A transplant is a person who moves within the country, state, city, or town. Their relationship to "home" is shaped by migration and cultural displacement.

Migration can complicate the sense of home by creating layered identities. Someone may feel more attached

to more than one place or that they belong to either. Movement across places can intensify questions about who we are, where we belong, and what it means to feel at home. It is important to explore how "home" is shaped by migration. Migration fundamentally detaches the concept of "home" from a fixed physical structure, transforming it into a dynamic, ongoing process of negotiation. For migrants, home becomes an emotional and psychological balancing act between mourning what was left behind, adapting to the present, and building future aspirations. Migration does not limit itself from country to country. It can also be from state to state, city to city, even neighborhood to neighborhood.

For students in our diverse community, the meaning of home is not universal. Some students identify home as the place they left behind—the country or city of their origin. Others identify home as their new city or the city where their family currently resides. Still others hold both places in their hearts simultaneously. A sense of home shapes who we are as people because inside of the home, we express who we are and share in commonalities with our family, whether nuclear or extended.

Anchor Text: *The House on Mango Street*

Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* is a lyrical, coming-of-age novel that is required reading for our eighth-grade students. This novel utilizes a series of vivid vignettes to explore a young Latinx girl's quest for identity, independence, and a space of her own in a segregated Chicago neighborhood.

At the opening of the novel, we meet 12-year-old Esperanza Cordero and her family. They move into a small run-down house on Mango Street. Though her family finally owns the property, it does not live up to Esperanza's expectations of what a house should look like. The house does not live up to her grandiose ideas and seems much like the apartments they had rented over the years. Esperanza was sure that once they owned a home, things would be different, but she does not feel that way. The house is situated in a crowded poor Latinx "barrio" (neighborhood) in Chicago. Poverty and social isolation surround them. But despite this, Esperanza makes friends and experiences childhood adventures with them.

As time progresses, Esperanza goes through puberty and begins to experience the harsh complexities of adulthood. She has a traumatic experience at a carnival and that changes her outlook on life. She is disillusioned and fearful of what life has in store for her as she matures into womanhood. Because of these traumas and the shame of poverty and racism, Esperanza begins writing poetry and stories. Writing becomes her way to emotionally escape and begin to define who she is.

By the end of the novel, Esperanza accepts that Mango Street has shaped her identity and made her who she is. While she decides that she will eventually leave the neighborhood to achieve her dream of owning her own home, she vows to return one day for the women she is leaving behind because like herself, she knows they deserve better. She feels it is her responsibility to others because she is part of the community no matter where life takes her.

Historical Context of the novel

Published in 1984, *The House on Mango Street* was heavily shaped by the urban, working-class landscape of Chicago in the 1960s and 1970s. Cisneros, writes the novel drawing directly from her youth in East Humboldt Park, a historically Puerto Rican and Mexican neighborhood that experienced racial segregation, economic hardship, and tensions with police. ¹¹

During this time, Cisneros was one of the first Latina writers to gain widespread mainstream recognition.

During the early 1980s, the Mexican American community in the United States was pushing for greater representation in the face of widespread marginalization. *The House on Mango Street* emerged from these civil rights and feminist pushback, specifically aiming to chronicle the marginalized female experience in the barrio, rather than the male-dominated narratives that were traditionally available.

Cisneros takes pride in being Latina and Chicana. As a woman of Mexican descent living in the United States, being Chicana is a specific identity that often carries a strong political meaning connected to community strength and a resistance to discrimination. The term Chicana carries the acknowledgement of a strong Mexican cultural heritage that can co-exist with the American culture creating a new space, honoring the “wholeness” of a person's identity. The term is also a clear rejection of the idea that people must deny their Mexican heritage to be real Americans.

To understand why it is so important for Cisneros to write from her personal experience growing up in Chicago, we must understand how and why Mexicans arrived there and what their life was like as immigrant members of the broader society. It all began with early migration and labor opportunities beginning around 1910 until about the 1930s. During this time there was a wave of Mexican workers brought in to work on the railroads and steel mills. They were drawn in by labor recruiters. Once here to work, they were housed in temporary settlements that consisted of converted railroad boxcars along the tracks in areas like South Chicago and Englewood. By the 1920s distinct Chicano and Mexican communities were taking root in neighborhoods like South Chicago and the Near West Side among others.

During the 1940's, World War II created a labor shortage, leading to another surge of migration from the U.S. Southwest and Mexico. This prompted the creation of the Bracero program. It was an agreement between Mexico and the United States allowing Mexicans to work under a short-term work permit in the United States. The program ended in 1964 and because of the large influx of Mexican laborers, it helped lay the foundation of Chicago's permanent Mexican Communities.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Chicago began an urban renewal and highway construction effort that managed to displace Mexican communities from the Near West Side. Because of this, these families shifted and settled heavily into neighborhoods like Pilsen and Little Village. These displacements were blatant examples of systemic racism and marginalization. Urban renewal crises prompted Mexican American youth to reject older, assimilationist approaches to integration. Instead, they embraced radical, visible identities such as the Chicano movement to explicitly demand geographic stability and municipal representation.

Moving into the late 1960s and 1970s, Civil Rights movements began to take hold, and the rise of the Chicano activists was felt. During this time Chicano activists organized and demanded better living, medical, and educational conditions. It was the fight to claim their ethnic self-determination and cultural autonomy.

In the book, *Brown in the Windy City*, the author Lilia Fernández argues that postwar urban renewal and racial classification were deeply intertwined forces that actively shaped the geographic and social positions of Mexicans (and Puerto Ricans) in Chicago. Rather than occupying a passive space, these groups engaged in "race-making" through their daily navigation of city politics, displacement, and community activism. Her view on Mexicans (and Puerto Ricans) in Chicago re-enforces how uprising and claiming space was the foundation of the community that exists today.

During the late 20th century, Chicago lost many residents due to deindustrialization. During this time, Chicanos and Mexican immigrants began the task of transforming neighborhoods and revitalizing commercial areas to preserve and make visible their heritage, culture and rich history across the city they helped build and

maintain.

Analysis of the novel: *The House on Mango Street*

Once we understand the historical context of the novel, we can relate themes and concepts of the novel back to history. *The House on Mango Street* is true to its setting and time period. Instead of focusing on historical facts, we can navigate the human aspect of what is going on in Chicago at the time, during Esperanza's coming of age. Like many of our students, *The House on Mango Street* is a novel that reflects the conflict some students may feel about identifying what home means and how to navigate the social complexities of belonging. Esperanza's struggle to define and claim her own home resonates deeply with students navigating related questions of belonging, identity, and displacement. This matters for understanding the themes of *The House on Mango Street* because Esperanza's reflections show that home is tied to dignity, self-definition, cultural experience, and the desire to belong. Reading the novel through the lens of cultural diversity allows students to see how the search for a home a search for identity and a place within a larger community is linked to who they are as people. Esperanza's "migration" is not from one country to another but from one house to another. She moves from house to house, always seeing them as temporary dwellings due to the desire that she had of living in a house she visualized as perfect, much different from her current reality.

The House on Mango Street is a novel that explores the complex issues of home and belonging. The main character in the novel, Esperanza, struggles with the concept of home. At the beginning of the novel, her home was a physical space. On page 3 of the novel Esperanza begins by stating that "The house on Mango Street is ours...But even so, it's not the house we'd thought we'd get." ⁴ Esperanza's concept of home in *The House on Mango Street* evolves from a physical, permanent dwelling of shame into an abstract, internal sanctuary built on autonomy, memory, and writing.

Home is deeply tied to Latinx identity, community, and the immigrant experience. This novel is a good representation of such. Mango Street itself is a character—representing both cultural richness and systemic disadvantages. Esperanza must navigate loving her community while wanting to break free of the space and all its limitations. We can appreciate that throughout the novel, Esperanza begins to connect to her community and realizes that it is not just something to escape but something that has shaped her.

Rationale

The concept of home is one that I as a teacher can relate to. Being a Puerto Rican born and raised in Connecticut created an internal conflict for many of my formative years. Much like my students, what I lived at home was different from what I experienced in the world, and my world was school during those years. Like many of my students I am the first generation, born on the mainland. That being said, my parents made it their life work to instill in me the language, culture, religious, and moral beliefs they were raised with. My household was very Puerto Rican during a time that it was not cool to be Puerto Rican. I understood at a young age that as a family we were in Connecticut by choice. My father had chosen to migrate to Connecticut because he wanted to escape meddling in-laws who were interfering in the rearing of his two older children. My father reasoned that if they were far enough away from his mother-in-law, he might have an opportunity to create the nuclear family he sought when he married my mom. In Puerto Rico my father worked for himself transporting sugar cane. We were not migrants out of necessity. I think it is important to mention that

because it eased the feelings of shame within myself that some of my classmates felt because their circumstances were different. Because we were here by choice, I understood that by choice we could leave at any time. As the years passed, the relatives that were living here returned to the Island. My family always said that Connecticut was not the destination but a stop on our way back to Puerto Rico. At this point it was a feeling of “don’t unpack because we are not staying”. This coupled with the fact that my parents frequently stated that this was not home, that we would be returning home one day, home being Puerto Rico. This sentiment went on for my first 19 years of life. My father’s plan was to return to Puerto Rico upon retirement and that he did. With the move, any sense of self for me went out the window. I moved to a place that was “home,” a home I knew nothing about. The location, a tropical island, was in stark contrast to Connecticut. The heat and the constant summer were confusing because the weather had always been a marker for change. As time went on, I began to recognize and identify with the culture and the people. I began to take pride in my heritage, and I could be unapologetically Puerto Rican. This realization helped me come full circle into an identity and sense of home that my parents worked hard to cultivate for all those years.

Many of my students have lived and/or are living a similar experience to my own. As a middle school teacher, I encounter students caught in the eternal conflict of questioning who they are and what their place is in this world. They are at a critical moment in their development where they are constructing identity. They are beginning to understand how their circumstances and life shape their world. At this age, students are grappling with questions of belonging, autonomy, and self-definition—the exact themes that drive Esperanza's (the main character from *The House on Mango Street*) narrative.

For middle schoolers, home is not simply a physical location; it is a complex intersection of safety, identity, family expectations, cultural heritage, and personal aspirations. By engaging with *The House on Mango Street*, my eighth graders can explore these abstract concepts through a relatable protagonist whose struggles mirror their own development. This unit validates students' emerging understanding that home is both a tangible and emotional space, and that their personal narratives matter; their voices matter. It lets our students know that their struggles are real and worthy of attention. When students are given the opportunity to explore and understand who they are, they can come to the realization that their futures are not predetermined but something they can create. Having a sense of “home” is an important part of this discovery. In a diverse urban community like New Haven, where our students navigate multiple cultures, languages, and systems of opportunity and constraint, this unit is not just a literature lesson; it is an exercise in validation, empowerment, and hope.

Background Knowledge and Content

This five-week unit will explore how the concept of “home” evolves throughout Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, examining the protagonist Esperanza's journey from feeling ashamed of where she lives and not feeling part of her community to the realization that even if she does leave Mango Street and her community, family will draw her back. Students will trace this transformation while connecting it to their own lived experiences of belonging, identity, and displacement. By the end of this unit, students will be able to identify how the concept of home evolves in the novel and articulate how Esperanza's journey relates to their own understanding of what “home” means.

Having background knowledge about an author helps us understand their literary work better. The author of

The House on Mango Street is Sandra Cisneros. She was born on December 20, 1954, in Chicago, Illinois, to a Mexican father and Mexican American mother. She grew up in a working-class, predominantly Latino neighborhood on the south side of Chicago, moving frequently between Chicago and Mexico City as her father commuted between the two countries for work. Upon their return, they often settled in different homes each time. This constant displacement and her experience navigating two cultures profoundly shaped her literary voice and thematic preoccupations.⁵

Her father, Alfredo, was an upholsterer and carpet layer; her mother, Elvira, came from a wealthy Mexican family but experienced significant downward mobility after marrying and immigrating. This class tension between her mother's expectations and her family's economic reality became a recurring element in her work.⁶ Because of these tensions, Cisneros' love for reading began in childhood. She found comfort and escape in books.

Cisneros went on to pursue multiple degrees in higher education. During the time that she was pursuing a master's degree of Fine Arts in Creative Writing in Iowa, she had a formative experience. In a workshop discussion about fathers and homes, she realized that her perspective on such was shaped by her Chicana identity, and working-class background. She also recognized that her perspective was fundamentally different from her predominantly white, middle-class peers. This moment crystallized her commitment to writing authentically from her own cultural and socioeconomic position.

During her time in Iowa, she also came to the realization that the moment she discovered her voice was also the moment she discovered class differences. Writing was about memory and imagination, nothing of which she read related to her. That was when she decided that she would tell her story; a story that would resonate with others like her.⁷ Her time in Iowa led to a lot of self-discovery. It was during this time that Cisneros wrote *The House on Mango Street*. She wrote the novel as a direct response to her lived experience of displacement and her desire to document the lives of girls and women in Latino communities, lives, she felt were underrepresented in literature.⁸ Cisneros weaves many of her childhood experiences into the novel. The topic of home and belonging is so important because Cisneros is sharing her own experience of living in modest houses and apartments across Chicago. Her family always aspired to own a home, the symbol of success and stability in America, but that never happened during her childhood. Even though the family never owned a home, Cisneros demonstrates her growing awareness of dignity despite economic hardship and the sense of belonging even if the "house" was never acquired.

I have examined the "why" Cisneros wrote the novel, but no less important is the "how" she wrote the novel and how this helps readers comprehend the broader message she wants to share. Cisneros relies on prose that is distinctly lyrical and poetic. She often utilizes short, fragmented sentences, vivid sensory imagery, and metaphorical language. Her style blends the accessibility of vernacular speech with literary sophistication, creating work that is both intellectually rich and emotionally immediate for the reader.⁹ This enhances the text to self-connection readers can experience when they read and can relate to Cisneros writing.

Cisneros also chose to write *The House on Mango Street* using vignettes. Vignettes are short, evocative descriptions, scenes, or passages, used in literature to capture a specific event, moment, or history. The vignette relies on imagery instead of plot to reach the reader to tell a story.¹⁰ The vignettes do not have a plot because they do not follow a sequencing of events that have a beginning, middle, or end construct. Cisneros often writes in a first-person, modernist narrative often exploring Chicana identity, bilingualism, and the intersection of Mexican American cultures. Writing in first person is linked to storytelling, and this perspective draws the reader to connect not only to the story but to the character.

Although my unit is focusing on the evolution of the concept of home, Cisneros addresses other themes. These themes relate to the idea of home because home is what grounds us. Identity and belonging in the context of the diaspora and displacement affect our sense of home because without this connection we lose the sense of community. She also addresses socioeconomic classes and the dignity of working-class communities. Many students can identify with this theme because where we live and who we live with depend on socioeconomics at times.

Cisneros includes the power of names and how names are linked to identity, community, sense of self and belonging. In the novel, Esperanza reflects on her name, its beauty in Spanish, its awkwardness in English. Her name carries the heavy weight of her Mexican heritage and her desire for independence. She is named after her great-grandmother, a woman who was "tamed" by marriage and spent her life looking sadly out the window, a fate Esperanza is determined to avoid. She feels that her being named after her grandmother is somehow sealing her fate. This idea is what drives her to want to find an identity she can claim as her own.

Teaching Strategies

The primary purpose of teaching strategies is to help us as teachers effectively deliver educational content, engage diverse learners, and improve student outcomes. Teaching strategy's structure instruction so students can better understand, apply, and retain new information.

When doing a novel study, one important strategy is the pre-reading strategy. Students should be introduced to the themes in the book before actually reading the book. More importantly, students relate these themes to themselves. The objective of this strategy is so that students can explore their own definitions and experiences of home before encountering Esperanza's journey in *The House on Mango Street*.

A prereading strategy that works well with students is when you ask them to do a silent reflection. This silent reflection is guided with prompts:

What is the first image that comes to mind when you think of home?

What does home feel like? What sounds, smells, or sensations do you associate with home?

When do you feel most at home?

What makes a place feel like home?

Offering students prompts and giving them wait time before formulating a response is helpful because students need time to process what is being asked and how they want to answer. From the silent reflection, students move to a written response. This gives the students the opportunity to record their thoughts using a low-stakes strategy because only they are seeing what they are writing. It is important to lower the affective filter *when asking students to open up and share themes that are personal to them.

In education, the affective filter is a psychological barrier that prevents learners from absorbing and processing new information. Formulated by linguist Stephen Krashen, it dictates that when a student experiences high anxiety, embarrassment, or low motivation, this "filter" goes up, blocking cognition.

Conversely, when students feel safe, this barrier drops.¹²

For some of our struggling students, I like to give them the opportunity to draw their responses to the prompts. Once students are done, I follow up with the pair-share strategy. I make it optional because early in a lesson, some students may not feel comfortable sharing out.

Once students do a personal reflection related to what home means to them, we can move on to the novel. Students will utilize the core text to create a “Four Walls Interactive Map”. They will create a collaborative anchor chart representing the house on Mango Street. The students will use information from the book and visually represent what the house on Mango Street looks like to Esperanza. Students will then go on to contrast and represent how she describes her ideal space. The connection through mapping is that students will map her journey from shame to desire for independence, showing how we view home is tied to self-determination.

Essential questions are always beneficial when introducing a novel. This strategy is important in the English language arts classroom. An essential question is formulated as an opinion inquiry. There is no correct answer, but students are guided to support their answers with reasons that support their thinking. Providing students with multiple essential questions benefits students of all levels because their answers will vary depending on their skill set. It also provides the opportunity to address questions, ideas, and concepts as they appear in real time.

A strategy that will be helpful when addressing the theme of migration is creating a timeline. This can help students connect the theme of migration in the novel to any personal experiences of migration. Students will use the vignette “Geraldo No Last Name” to analyze the emotions and hard work of moving to a new country. Students will discuss how Geraldo is viewed as an invisible migrant worker with no home to return to. They will then research and or interview a family member to create a visual timeline of why people leave and migrate. The students will gain a deeper understanding of why people migrate and what are some of the more serious reasons behind these moves.

Anticipation guides are useful when actually introducing the novel. By utilizing the anticipatory guide, teachers can introduce the thematic concepts and students take a stance before reading. This strategy allows students to ponder a real situation. It challenges students to think and commit to an idea because there is never a “maybe” or “depends”. Students begin to understand that not many situations are black or white, right or wrong.

Once we are reading a novel, one teaching strategy I use is guided exploration. This strategy allows students to read independently, as a group, utilize audio, or teacher-led readings. Students can engage in any of the reading options being practiced for the day. Students are then guided to record any initial reactions or questions. As a class, close readings are another beneficial strategy. A close reading involves a multi-step process. Students first observe literal meaning and basic structure, then move to deeper interpretations of the text. During a close reading, students note specific textual evidence, patterns, and anomalies.

As work on the novel continues, I like to use the “fishbowl” method. This method allows a targeted discussion about some themes in the novel. While a group of students are in the middle of the room, discussing a question, concept, or observation, the students surrounding them are taking notes, annotating clarifying questions, and formulating counter arguments. The observing students are not allowed to join the discussion until the students in the center of the circle are done. It basically forces students to really listen in order to formulate solid arguments. This strategy promotes meaningful student discourse.

Graphic organizers are always helpful, especially as a differentiation tool when conducting a novel study. They act as visual roadmaps. They make abstract reading concepts concrete. They help readers track complex plots, characters, and themes. They prevent students from getting lost in a long book. ¹³

As the novel study concludes, the strategies that I use are creating an alternative ending or an epilogue. An epilogue is a concluding section added to the book that takes place after the end of the novel. I choose these two strategies over an essay because these strategies allow students to show what they have learned. It also allows students to imagine what happens to the characters after the story concludes based on inferences. Some differentiation strategies that I employ for the final writing piece are letter writing. Students who find writing more challenging can choose to write a letter to the main character. They can either ask the character questions or give their opinion about anything in the book. This is helpful for some students because it promotes inquiry and further discussion about the novel. Other students can choose to create a collage where they include a favorite quote, themes, and drawings to summarize what they have learned and how they connected to the novel.

Classroom Activities

After all introductory activities are concluded and the anticipation guides have been worked on, a lesson that is beneficial is a lesson where they explore their name.

Activity one:

My name: Persona Poetry.

Objective: Students will explore how names carry history, heritage, and the weight of geographical displacement.

Use the vignette “My Name”. Examine how Esperanza describes her name as “a muddy color” in English but “soft like silver” in Spanish. Discuss how she inherited the name from a grandmother she never met.

Students will then proceed to write a poem about their own name, nickname, or name they wish they had. Students will connect and understand how migration can taint family histories and how names act as pieces in cultural identity.

Activity two:

The inherited home vs. The ideal home

Objective: Students will contrast Esperanza’s physical reality with her dream house to define home as a reflection of socioeconomic status.

Brainstorm words associated with home. Circle words that relate to feeling and underline words that relate to physical structures.

Define migrant experience and assimilation. Discuss how moving to a new country or neighborhood changes

the expectations of shelter.

Read the first vignette, “The House on Mango Street” and proceed to create a T-chart on the board. Label one side as the actual house on Mango Street and the other side as the dream house.

With the information on the chart, explain why Esperanza is ashamed of her current home.

Activity three

The Outsider’s Home and Neighborhood Borders

Objective: Students will analyze how neighborhood dynamics and prejudice shape a migrant's sense of belonging.

Discuss “How do neighborhoods get their reputation? Who decides who belongs in a neighborhood.

Read the vignettes “Cathy Queen of Cats” and “Geraldo No Last Name”.

Form groups of 4 students to discuss the following: Cathy’s comment that her family is moving because the neighborhood is “getting bad”. Contrast this with Geraldo, who has no legal status and lives in the margins without a permanent home.

Write a paragraph and explain how Cathy’s prejudice directly affects Esperanza’s sense of safety and belonging in her new home.

Write another paragraph explaining what Geraldo’s story teaches us about the dangers of being a migrant without a stable home.

Activity four

Empathy, Class, and Shared Spaces

Objective: Students will evaluate how Esperanza’s growing maturity shifts her view of home from a personal grievance to a site of social responsibility.

Discuss: If you become wealthy, would you ever go back to your old neighborhood? Why or why not?

Shared reading of the vignette, “Bums in the Attic” in the format of a close reading analysis. Highlight the quote: “People who live on hills sleet so close to the stars they forget those of us who live too much on earth.” Discuss the symbol of the hill. It signifies wealth. The attic signifies a space for the displaced.

With a partner, draft a double entry journal entry. On the left, paste Esperanza’s plan to invite homeless people into her future attic. On the right explain how this changes her definition of home.

Then as a group discuss the following question, How does inviting others into her dream home show her evolution as a person?

Activity 5

Autonomy and the Self-Made Home

Objective: Students will synthesize the unit by examining home as a symbol of independence and creative freedom.

Discuss: What does the phrase “a space of my own” mean to you beyond just a bedroom?

Shared reading of the vignette “A House of My Own” and the final vignette “Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes.”

As a class, stop and jot the responses to the concept of how for Esperanza, home is no longer just a building but a space she creates through her writing. Site specific evidence in the text to support this statement.

As a culminating activity, students will write a 5-sentence vignette describing their own ideal future “home”. It must include one metaphor and explain what this home represents for their personal identity. They can use one illustration to compliment the writing.

Once completed, students will do a gallery walk and ask at least one question to 4 different students in relation to their concept of home.

Annotated Bibliography

Section 1: Sandra Cisneros, Spatial Poetics, and Literary Criticism

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

The core novel of the curriculum unit. This work consists of forty-four vignettes tracing the life of Esperanza Cordero, a young Latina growing up in Chicago. The text introduces 'home' not merely as a physical shelter, but as a site of socio-economic shame, gendered confinement, and ultimate creative liberation.

Cisneros, Sandra. *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015.

A companion memoir that provides crucial biographical context for the curriculum. Cisneros details her nomadic upbringing between Mexico City and Chicago, her struggles to find a quiet space to write, and how her real-world displacement informed the geographical and emotional architecture of *Mango Street*.

Doyle, Jacqueline. 'More Room of One's Own: Courtship, Marriage, and Space in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*.' *MELUS* 19, no. 4 (1994): 5–35.

This literary critique examines domestic spaces within the novel as sites of patriarchal confinement for women. Doyle analyzes vignettes like 'Linoleum Roses' and 'Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice' to illustrate how the physical house can become a prison, contrasting with Esperanza's quest for an autonomous space.

Ganz, Robin. 'Sandra Cisneros: To Spite Love.' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 36, no. 1 (1994): 19–41.

Ganz provides a foundational overview of Cisneros's literary development. The article discusses how Cisneros

bridges her Mexican heritage with her Chicago urban reality, creating a distinct binational aesthetic that redefines traditional American and Mexican concepts of domesticity.

Matchie, Thomas. 'Literary History, *Mango Street*, and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.' *Chicano-Latino Literary Review* 2, no. 1 (1995): 45-60.

This study compares Esperanza's urban journey to Huck Finn's river journey. Matchie analyzes how both protagonists navigate changing landscapes to form an independent moral framework, emphasizing how Esperanza uses her neighborhood's shifting borders to construct her own definition of home.

Sloboda, Nicholas. 'Chicana Migratory Spaces and Spatial Poetics in Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*.' *Journal of American Studies* 34, no. 2 (2000): 291-307.

Sloboda focuses explicitly on spatial poetics, examining how the migrant experience destabilizes permanent geographical markers. The article shows how Esperanza uses writing as a fluid psychological space to transcend her physical displacement on Mango Street.

Section 2: Historical Context of Mexican Migration to Chicago

Acuña, Rodolfo F. *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*. 9th ed. Boston: Pearson, 2020.

A seminal historical text providing a macro-level view of Mexican migration patterns to the American Midwest. This volume contextualizes the socioeconomic pressures, labor demands, and systemic housing discrimination that shaped Mexican enclaves in post-World War II Chicago.

Arredondo, Gabriela F. *Mexican Chicago: Race, Identity, and Nation, 1916-39*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Arredondo investigates the early formulation of Mexican communities in Chicago. This historical text is crucial for showing how earlier waves of migrants laid the cultural infrastructure for neighborhoods like Pilsen, establishing 'home' as a contested, racialized space long before the setting of Cisneros's novel.

Betancur, John J. 'The Settlement Park and the Chicano Enclave: A Case Study of Pilsen in Chicago.' *Urban Studies* 33, no. 3 (1996): 495-517.

This urban studies article details the physical transformation of Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood—the primary cultural inspiration for *Mango Street*. Betancur traces the shifts from European immigrant settlement to a vibrant Chicano enclave, analyzing the pressures of urban renewal and displacement.

Fernández, Lilia. *Brown in the Windy City: Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Postwar Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

Fernández provides an essential socio-spatial history of Latino migration to Chicago during the mid-to-late 20th century. The book explains how urban renewal projects displaced families into neighborhoods like Little Village, directly mirroring the unstable housing conditions faced by Esperanza's family.

Padilla, Felix M. *Latino Ethnic Consciousness: The Case of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.

Published around the same time as Cisneros's novel, this sociological study explores the collective identity formed by Mexican and Puerto Rican residents in Chicago. It offers concrete socio-political context for the shared multicultural neighborhood dynamics portrayed throughout the novel.

Toro-Morn, Maura I. 'Gender, Class, and Migration: Central American and Mexican Women in Chicago.' *Gender & Society* 9, no. 6 (1995): 712–726.

This study analyzes the gendered realities of migration to Chicago. It examines how migrant women navigate labor markets and community spaces to build new domestic sanctuaries, providing empirical

background to support the novel's focus on women's unique domestic struggles.

Section 3: Pedagogical Frameworks and Literacy Practices

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

A foundational theoretical framework for the classroom. Anzaldúa's concept of the 'borderlands' helps teachers reframe 'home' from a static geographical coordinate to a fluid, psychological space where multiple linguistic, cultural, and personal identities intersect.

Janks, Hilary. *Literacy and Power*. London: Routledge, 2010.

This text provides a practical Critical Literacy framework for the classroom. Janks outlines methods for students to analyze how power designs physical spaces, enabling teachers to structure neighborhood-mapping projects based on the social divisions in Cisneros's work.

Rief, Linda. *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts with Adolescents*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1992.

A highly practical guide for implementing writing workshops in middle school classrooms. Rief demonstrates how to utilize brief literary vignettes as mentor texts, providing a blueprint for the Day 4 creative assessment where students author their own spatial narratives.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

Key Ideas and Details

RL.8.1 (Textual Evidence): Cite the strongest textual evidence to support an analysis of explicit statements and implicit inferences.

RL.8.2 (Theme and Summary): Determine the novel's theme, analyze its development over the course of the text, and provide an objective summary.

RL.8.3 (Plot and Character Dynamics): Analyze how specific lines of dialogue or plot incidents propel the action, reveal character traits, or force a decision.

Craft and Structure

RL.8.4 (Word Choice and Tone): Determine figurative and connotative meanings of words, evaluating how specific choices impact tone, allusions, or analogies.

RL.8.5 (Structural Analysis): Compare and contrast how the structure of multiple texts or distinct sections within a text contributes to meaning and style.

RL.8.6 (Point of View): Analyze how differences in points of view between characters and the reader create effects like suspense or dramatic irony.

Range of Reading and Text Complexity

RL.8.10 (Text Complexity): Read and comprehend literature independently and proficiently at the high end of the grades 6–8 text complexity band.

Writing Standards

W.8.1 (Argumentative Writing): Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

W.8.2 (Informative Writing): Write informative texts to examine a topic and convey ideas through relevant content.

Speaking and Listening Standards

SL.8.1 (Collaborative Discussion): Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade 8 topics and texts.

SL.8.3 (Evaluate Speaker Claims): Delineate a speaker's argument, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance of evidence.

End Notes

1. Cambridge Dictionary, s.v. "home," accessed August 11, 2026, [cambridge.org](https://www.cambridge.org).
2. New Haven Public Schools accessed August 11, 2026, nhps.net
3. Brah, Avtar. 2022. *Decolonial Imaginings: Intersectional Conversations and Contestations*. London: Goldsmiths Press
4. Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street* (Houston TX: Arte Publico Press, 1984), 3. [1]
5. Kerri Lee Alexander, "Sandra Cisneros," National Women's History Museum, 2019
6. Kerri Lee Alexander, "Sandra Cisneros," National Women's History Museum, 2019
7. Rebecca Sutton, "Hispanic Heritage Flashback Friday: Sandra Cisneros on Recognizing Ourselves," National Endowment for the Arts (blog), September 25, 2020
8. Rebecca Sutton, "Hispanic Heritage Flashback Friday: Sandra Cisneros on Recognizing Ourselves," National Endowment for the Arts (blog), September 25, 2020
9. "Writing Inspiration: Author Interviews with Sandra Cisneros," *The Writer*, accessed August 11, 2026, [writermag.com](https://www.writermag.com). [1]

10. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "vignette," accessed August 11, 2026, merriam-webster.com.
11. John J. Betancur, "The Settlement Experience of Latinos in Chicago: Segregation, Speculation, and the Ecology Model," *Social Forces* 74, no. 4 (1996): 1299-1324.
12. Valentina Gonzalez, "What Is the Affective Filter, and Why Is It Important in the Classroom," Seidlitzblog (blog), September 22, 2020
13. Iowa Reading Research Center accessed August 11, 2026, <https://iowareadingresearch.org>.

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