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Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The House on Mango Street

by Sandra Cisneros

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To The Teacher

In order to allow the teacher maximum flexibility in his or her approach, we have grouped the prompts by sections. The teacher may, therefore, assign specific prompts or allow the students to select one or more prompts from each section

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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Class Record Sheet

25.	24.	23.	22.	21.	20.	19.	18.	17.	16.	15.	14.	13.	12.	11.	10.	9.	8.	7.	6.	5.	4.	3.	2.	
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Response Sheet

Name	_	Section	_ D	ate	

The House on Mango Street

1. Ownership, especially of houses, is a significant aspect of American society. Often people's identity and status are associated with the area in which they live, the kind of house they live in, and if they own or rent. The narrator of this story remembers pointing to her apartment and being asked, "'You live there?' The way she said it made me feel like nothing.... I knew I had to have a house. A real house."

Describe your home. What does the area and house tell about your identity and social status?

Hairs

- 2. The narrator shares intimate details of her family. To know the feel and smell of someone's hair and skin is to be close, in a loving way, to that person. Record your memories of the hair and skin of your family members, or the people with whom you are close.
- 3. Reading this description, I get the impression the narrator feels a sense of security. The association I make for the phrase "the warm smell of bread" is of being provided with something essential and filling, "the bread of life." What impressions and associations do you make with this short sketch?

Boys & Girls

- 4. Do you agree with the narrator's statement, "The boys and the girls live in separate worlds"? Using your own experience as a reference point, what evidence do you see of separateness or lack of separateness?
- 5. When the separateness exists, what, in your opinion, causes it? Specifically, are there inborn differences between males and females in terms of the way they communicate, approach things, think; or are any differences the result of social training and expectations?
- 6. How would you define a best friend? Use a best friend you have or had to illustrate your point.
- 7. Tell about a time you felt you were "a balloon tied to an anchor." This could be any time you wanted to be free, but felt held down by a responsibility or restraint.

My Name

- 8. What associations do you make with your name? Are you named for anyone? If so, how do you feel about it? If not, why did your parents give you the name they did?
- 9. Esperanza makes the following comments about women:

"the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong." "She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow."

Based on your experience, list some factors that cause a person to be passive and sad or to lead a life of unrealized dreams and potential. These factors can include gender bias for men as well as women. What conclusions can you come to about ending up, not experiencing life, but only watching it by the window, as Esperanza puts it?

Cathy Queen of Cats

- 10. Often, people reveal their attitudes and values by the way they interpret things around them. Cathy says a lot to Esperanza about the neighborhood and the people in it. What is your opinion of Cathy? Does Cathy remind you of anyone?
- 11. What do you find amusing about the title of this sketch?

Our Good Day

12. Tell about a time you had a good day sharing something with friends.

Laughter

- 13. What characteristics or understandings do members of your family share?
- 14. Esperanza describes laughter figuratively: "the shy ice cream bells' giggle" Think of a person that you know who has distinctive laughter. Describe the laughter in terms of something familiar.

Gil's Furniture Bought & Sold

15. Write a short human interest story for the local newspaper of Gil's town. Tell about Gil, his store, and his hidden treasures.

Meme Ortiz

- 16. What do you find comical in this sketch?
- 17. What does the image of the huge tree suggest to you?

Louie, His Cousin & His Other Cousin

- 18. Imagine that you are Marin and write a letter to a close friend in Puerto Rico telling about your life on Mango Street, your feelings about living there, and the incident with the yellow Cadillac. Try to use the way of speaking of a girl Marin's age.
- 19. What do you find comical in this sketch?

Marin

- 20. Make up a dialogue between Marin and a feminist woman. What would they say to each other about goals in life, how to achieve them, and men in general?
- 21. Describe what you imagine Marin's future will be like.
- 22. Tell about a person you know (or knew) who is a bit older and more experienced than you, but willing to talk to you about life's secrets, the things that most people won't talk about.

Those Who Don't

23. What does this sketch tell you about fear and prejudice?

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

- 24. What disturbs you the most about the episode of Rosa Vargas and her children?
- 25. Esperanza explains that everybody got "tired of being worried about kids who aren't even yours" and gave up. Do you see Rosa, her situation, and the well-being of her children as hopeless? If not, what might help? Tell of situations that you know of or have heard about in the news that might be considered hopeless.

Alicia Who Sees Mice

- 26. What would you like to say to Alicia?
- 27. Perhaps Alicia fears being trapped by poverty or by her father, who believes a woman's place is taking care of a home. What type of situation or belief system do you want to avoid, perhaps one you fear getting trapped by?

Darius & The Clouds

28. While observing a cloud-filled sky, Darius felt assurance of the presence of God. What do you think and feel when you notice the sky?

And Some More

- 29. What strikes you as unusual about this part of the story?
- 30. It seems that humans have a need to label everything they experience. For instance, psychology categorizes human behavior by type. Pretend you have to give a two minute speech on names: naming things, calling names, the significance of a name. Write down what you would say, just off the top of your head.

The Family of Little Feet

- 31. When Esperanza puts on the lady's high heels, she explains, "But the truth is it is scary to look down at your foot that is no longer yours and see attached a long long leg." When did you first notice that you were making the transition from childhood to adulthood?
- 32. How did you feel when you read the incident with the bum and Rachel?

A Rice Sandwich

- 33. In this sketch, Esperanza is creative as she works to convince her mother to let her eat lunch at school. Explain one of your more creative persuasive attempts to get something you wanted.
- 34. What would you like to say to the nun who talks to Esperanza?

Chanclas

- 35. Esperanza, feeling self-conscious about having to wear her old shoes with "the heels all crooked that look dumb with this dress," just sits at the party. Recall the times in your experience that your clothing made a difference in your behavior. Write a short editorial on the importance of fashion for young people.
- 36. At this point in the series of vignettes, Esperanza has matured enough for young men to notice her. She says, "All night the boy who is a man watches me dance. He watched me dance." Tell about the first time, in your maturity, that you knew someone was interested in you.

Hips

- 37. What is your opinion of Esperanza's explanation, both "scientific" and poetic, of hips?
- 38. Children love chants and rhymes, both to make up and to repeat the ones everyone knows. Share some of your favorites.

The First Job

- 39. If you have had a job, think back over your experience. What do you think every employer should do for a new employee? Consider what might have helped you, Esperanza, or anyone else you know.
- 40. What are your feelings towards the Oriental man?
- 41. Considering Esperanza's experience with both the women and the man mentioned that she worked with, what conclusions can you come to about the way humans treat each other?

Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark

- 42. Each culture has its own way to "send the dead away" and to express grief. What do you know about your family's practices?
- 43. Esperanza is able to understand her father's sorrow about the loss of his father after she considers how hard her father works and how much she needs him. Often in life one person is able to comfort another by identifying with the feelings of the other person. Tell about a time when you were able to identify with the feelings of another. What did you think about that helped you understand this person?

Born Bad

44. In this chapter, Esperanza seems to be considering some of the uncomfortable questions of life. First, she thinks about the consequences of being mean. She seems to feel guilty for imitating her dying aunt, the aunt who had been kind to her. She may be trying to excuse what she did when she says, "we didn't know..." and "we forgot." At the same time, she states "Most likely I will go to hell and most likely I deserve to be there." She says she prays for what she did to Aunt Lupe. Esperanza mentions dreams that haunt her.

State your positions on the following questions: What are the consequences of human meanness? Specifically, do you think that people go to hell for being mean? What can people do to relieve their guilt?

45. The other questions Esperanza explores are about human suffering. She realizes that Lupe's family suffers as a result of her suffering; that a person's pain affects those connected to her. She mentions several possible explanations for Lupe's illness, including the idea that "maybe God was busy." Then, she concludes, "But I think diseases have no eyes. They pick with a dizzy finger anyone, just anyone."

Do you agree that there is no explanation for suffering; and that bad things happen to people randomly?

46. The book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, indicates that we should not ask why. In your opinion, how should people respond when bad things happen?

Elenita, Cards, Palm, Water

- 47. When you read this episode, what mental picture did you get of Esperanza sitting with Elenita?
- 48. Do you think Esperanza should be pleased about her fortune, "a new house, a house made of heart"? If you lived on Mango Street, would you be content with "a house made of heart"? What do you think is meant by the phrase?
- 49. It seems that Elenita has mixed together symbols and tokens from religion and superstition. What are your experiences or opinions of fortune tellers like Elenita?

Geraldo No Last Name

50. What do you find sad about the story of Geraldo?

Edna's Ruthie

51. If you lived next door to Ruthie, would you spend time with her? Why or why not.

The Earl of Tennessee

- 52. What do you find most amusing in the description of Earl?
- 53. Esperanza describes Earl coming home at night by just telling the sounds: "click and whine," "excited tinkling." Describe an event by just telling the sequence of sounds. Use specific, figurative words such as "the scrape of concrete" or "the moan of the wooden door."

Sire

- 54. How would a psychiatrist explain Esperanza's interest in Lois and Sire?
- 55. Esperanza describes her reactions to Sire looking at her. She explains, "It made your blood freeze to have somebody look at you like that." Describe an experience you have had with someone looking at you. Be sure to include your reactions, your feelings, and your behavior.

Four Skinny Trees

- 56. Esperanza says the trees teach. List the "truths of life" the trees are teaching her. For instance, Esperanza states that the trees grow "despite concrete." "They do not forget to reach." This suggests that no matter how difficult an individual's circumstances are, he or she should continue to try and to achieve.
- 57. Esperanza's description of the trees uses figurative language. She uses personification when she describes the trees as having necks and elbows. One metaphor is "they...bite the sky with violent teeth." The line, "Let one forget his reason for being, they'd all drop like tulips in a glass, each with their arms around the other" is a simile.

Select an aspect of nature you feel represents an aspect of human nature. Use figurative language to describe your idea.

No Speak English

- 58. What do you find comical in this selection?
- 59. Do you sympathize with Mamacita?
- 60. Esperanza says, "Every once in a while [he] lets out a cry, hysterical, high, as if he had torn the only skinny thread that kept her alive, the only road out to that country." The adjectives "hysterical" "high" and the simile of cutting the only thread give a vivid description of what Mamacita feels. Write a descriptive sentence that conveys a person's feeling. You may need to precede the sentence with the situation the person is in.

Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays

- 61. If you could write a letter to Rafaela's husband, what would you say to him?
- 62. What would you say to Rafaela about going to the dance hall?

Sally

- 63. Imagine you are Sally. Describe a day in your life, including your feelings about what goes on.
- 64. To what degree do you think parents should control how their children dress?

Minerva Writes Poems

- 65. Write the thoughts of Minerva.
- 66. Abused women represent a social problem that generates feelings of helplessness. What are your thoughts on this problem?

Bums in the Attic

67. Write a short article for a newspaper on the ways people of all income levels react to poverty.

Beautiful & Cruel

- 68. Do you think that *The House on Mango Street* is a feminist novel? Why or why not?
- 69. It is natural for young people to anticipate leaving their parents' homes and "going off on their own." Today, young males and females often go into the service, get jobs, move into apartments with friends, or go to college. Do you think young women still consider marriage the way to leave home? How do you plan to go on your own?

A Smart Cookie

- 70. Esperanza shares her mother's talents with the reader; it seems that with her mother's ability, she should have "been somebody." However, the mother says she quit school because she felt shame about not having nice clothing. What are your talents?
- 71. Examine your own fears, problems, or feelings of shame that might prevent you from developing your talents. Write a letter to yourself that you could use as a future reminder. Tell yourself what you can do and the destructive thoughts or situations you need to avoid in your future.

What Sally Said

72. Do you think Sally should continue living with her father?

- 73. Sally's father is an extreme, out of control parent who worries about his child and tries to control or prevent her from making bad choices. Under somewhat more normal circumstances, what should parents understand about controlling their children, once the children reach their teens? Make a list.
- 74. Some people may consider Mango Street a "bad" environment, a place that offers many dangerous opportunities, like drugs and violence. These people might insist that a person growing up on Mango Street would be exposed to so many negative social pressures that he or she could not help but get caught up in the negative behaviors or vices that so many others engage in. List the vices of a low-income environment and the problems that lead to people getting involved with them. Next to each vice, write your opinion about the chances that an individual living in a bad environment would engage in the vice. Then, explain the chances a person living in a good environment has of getting involved.

The Monkey Garden

- 75. Tell about an abandoned or uncared for place where you once played.
- 76. Who do you have the most sympathy for: Sally or Esperanza?

Red Clowns

- 77. How did you feel as you read this chapter?
- 78. What do you think might help Esperanza?

Linoleum Roses

- 79. Esperanza seems to be suggesting that Sally made a mistake in getting married so young. Describe a marriage that you think was a mistake. Give the details of what makes it seem wrong.
- 80. Considering the other details Esperanza has given you about Sally, what do you think Sally's future will be like?

The Three Sisters

- 81. What do you find disturbing in this story?
- 82. The sister with the marble hands tells Esperanza, "When you leave you must remember to come back for the others." How, in practical terms, could Esperanza come back for the others?
- 83. Do you think Esperanza is obligated to help others escape Mango Street?

Alicia & I Talking on Edna's Steps

- 84. What is your view of Esperanza's attitude toward Mango Street?
- 85 Do you agree with Alicia?

A House of My Own

86. Write a short story that tells about your own dream house. Just as Esperanza does, in your own dream house, correct all of the things that you don't like about your present house.

Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes

- 87. Do you think that Esperanza will leave Mango Street?
- 88. Will she come back and help others?
- 89. What about your present situation are you anxious to escape?

Test

- 1. Esperanza is disappointed in her house on Mango Street because
 - A. it can be seen by the nuns from her school windows.
 - B. her family must share the yard with their neighbors.
 - C. it is red and crumbling, with only one bathroom, and it falls short of the family "dream" house.
 - D. there are no stairs.
- 2. Which of the following statements about Esperanza is true?
 - A. Esperanza does not like her name because it is difficult for Americans to pronounce.
 - B. Esperanza was born in the year of the horse. This is unlucky because Mexicans do not like their women to be strong.
 - C. Esperanza does not understand why she must care for her younger sister Nenny.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
- 3. The music box Nenny finds in the junk store may be considered similar to Esperanza's life because
 - A. the music box is in an ugly case but plays beautiful music. Esperanza lives on an ugly street, but, inside, she is capable of greatness.
 - B. the beauty of the music box is being greedily kept captive in the ugly junk shop by the man just as the lives of women on Mango Street are restricted by the men in their lives.
 - C. the music box is something wonderful hidden by the mass of junk in the junk shop. Esperanza is also something wonderful obscured by all of the characters on Mango Street.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C

- 4. What, according to Esperanza's view of the world, is wrong with Marin's dream, as described in the following quotation?

 "She's going to get a real job downtown because that's where the best jobs are, since you always get to look beautiful and get to wear nice clothes and can meet someone in the subway who might marry you."
 - A. Marin's dream depends on a man to provide her with a happy life. Esperanza believes women must learn to be strong and behave more like men.
 - B. Marin does not have the education or refinement to get one of those jobs downtown.
 - C. Marin's father will never let her dress in fancy clothes or travel downtown.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
- 5. "The kids bend trees and bounce between cars and dangle upside down from knees and almost break like fancy museum vases you can't replace." The above passage is an example of
 - A. poetic lines in blank verse.
 - B. personification used to create images.
 - C. poetic style of writing prose which contains sound and images.
 - D. Both B and C
- 6. Which of the following incidents from the story supports the idea that feet may be a symbol for growing up or maturity?
 - A. Rosa Vargas has too many children just like the fairy tale of the old woman who lived in a shoe.
 - B. Esperanza is embarrassed by her ugly brown school shoes and won't dance with the boy at the baptism.
 - C. Rachel doesn't fit into the fancy shoes the woman with the small feet gives to the girls.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C

- 7. Esperanza's belief in God is best demonstrated by
 - A. the fact that she thinks Darius is wise when he points out a cloud in the sky and says it is God.
 - B. her respect and admiration for the nuns at her school.
 - C. the compassion Esperanza and her friends demonstrate for Aunt Lupe's suffering.
 - D. her efforts to prevent the boys from making Sally kiss them before they will return her keys.
- 8. Which of the following vignettes in the novel help the reader to understand that Esperanza is becoming a young woman?
 - A. Esperanza and her friends make up songs about hips, but young Nenny is unable to make up a similar song.
 - B. Esperanza lies about her age to get a job because Catholic school is expensive.
 - C. Esperanza is attracted to Sire but knows she is not ready for a relationship with him.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
- 9. Mamacita, who is upset because the baby is learning to speak English, illustrates that
 - A. it is very difficult for immigrants to raise their children in America and still maintain their own cultural identity.
 - B. children adjust to the changes in their lives better than adults.
 - C. Mamacita is too old and fat to change her ways. She is selfish to try to deny the baby a chance at a good life in America.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C

- 10. Which of the following chapters illustrates that Esperanza, after she achieves her dreams, will return to Mango Street to help others escape? The chapter in which
 - A. she wants to have "bums" in her attic.
 - B. she talks about Geraldo and his unfortunate death.
 - C. Sally is looking at the linoleum roses in her new house.
 - D. Minerva, the writer, is trapped by her abusive husband.
- 11. "Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. "Let one forget his reason for being, they'd all droop like tulips in a glass, each with their arms around the other."

 The above passage from the novel best illustrates that trees
 - A. may be a symbol of maturity in this novel.
 - B. have roots just as Esperanza has roots.
 - C. grow despite the rough sidewalk, just as Esperanza grows despite her poverty.
 - D. may be a symbol for family and family unity.
- 12. Which of the following superstitions is presented in the story?
 - A. Someone will die if a dog cries and then a yellow bird flies into a window.
 - B. To cure a headache, rub a cold egg across your face.
 - C. Wearing high-heeled shoes leads young girls into prostitution.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
- 13. Esperanza's mother is not abused by her father, but her life is restricted because
 - A. she must take care of her aging mother-in-law as well as her four children.
 - B. she can speak two languages and sing opera but is forbidden by her husband to take the train into the city.
 - C. she does not continue her education because she is ashamed of her poor clothes.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C

- 14. The chapter titled "Those Who Don't" refers to people who drive down Mango street by accident and illustrates the theme that
 - A. sickness strikes its victims randomly.
 - B. what other people have is not necessarily better than what you have.
 - C. prejudice and fear of other races is felt by people of all colors.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
- 15. The story about Esperanza and her rice sandwich shows that
 - A. Esperanza is ashamed of her mother.
 - B. both Esperanza and her mother have good imaginations and a good sense of humor.
 - C. Esperanza will do anything to separate herself from Nenny.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
- 16. The monkey garden may be considered a metaphor for life on Mango Street because
 - A. the garden is full of a big variety of life, just as Mango Street is full of many kinds of people.
 - B. the garden is well cared for until the family with the monkey moves away; then it becomes cluttered with weeds and cars. Mango Street may have been beautiful at one time, but the people who built it have moved away and now it is crumbling like the garden.
 - C. the garden is a pleasant refuge from life on Mango Street until Sally decides to kiss the boys. Mango Street was a fun place to play as a child but not a good place to live as an adult woman.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
- 17. In the following quotation about the tree in Meme's backyard, what do the balls in the gutters represent?
 - "All around, the neighborhood of roofs, black-tarred and A-framed, and in their gutters, the balls that never came back down to earth."
 - A. It represents the people who leave Mango Street and never return.
 - B. It represents the dreams of the people on Mango Street that never quite come true.
 - C. It represents the lost childhood of Esperanza's mother.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C

- 18. What is suggested about Esperanza's future in the following passage from the book?
 - "Not a flat. Not an apartment in back. Not a man's house. Not a daddy's. A house all my own."
 - A. Esperanza wants to own a single family home in the future.
 - B. Esperanza wants to make a successful life for herself, independent of a husband or her father.
 - C. Esperanza will always live alone.
 - D. Esperanza wants a pretty, feminine house rather than an ugly red brick house like her father's.
- 19. When Louis' cousin steals the yellow Cadillac, Esperanza learns that
 - A. one way to get off Mango Street is to steal, but it is not a good way.
 - B. Cadillacs are not as much fun to ride in as she imagined.
 - C. stealing is wrong, and the thief goes to jail if caught.
 - D. Both A and B
 - E. A, B, and C
- 20. Esperanza prefers to play with Rachael and Lucy instead of Cathy because
 - A. Rachael and Lucy are from Mexico, just like Esperanza's family.
 - B. refuses to let Esperanza ride her bicycle alone; instead, she insists that Esperanza ride on the handlebars while Cathy pedals.
 - C. Cathy hurts Esperanza's feelings by saying her family is moving away because the neighborhood is getting bad.
 - D. Rachael and Lucy take the time to tell Esperanza all about the people in the neighborhood.

Test Student Answer Sheet

Name:	
1	11
2	12
3	13
4	14
5	15
6	16
7	17
8	18
9	19
10	20

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Test Answer Key

11.<u>D</u>

2.<u>D</u>

12.<u>D</u>

4.__A__

14.__<u>C</u>__

5.__A__

15.__B__

6.<u>B</u>_

16.<u>E</u>

7.<u>A</u>

18.<u>B</u>

9.<u>A</u>

19.<u>A</u>

10.<u>A</u>

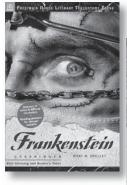
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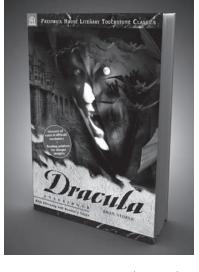
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