

---

## The House On Mango Street: Esperanza Analysis

Throughout the novel, *La Casa en Mango Street*, written by Sandra Cisneros, Esperanza's perception of her identity alters over her journey with who she is and who she wants to become in life. Esperanza is seeking to define herself and does so through various struggles and events. Her family is in the United States and living in poverty, she dreams and hopes for her family to overcome poverty. Esperanza has a variety of female role models in her life. Many are trapped in abusive relationships, waiting for others to change their lives. Some are actively trying to change things on their own. Through these women and Esperanza's reactions to them, Cisneros displays not only the hardships women face but also explores their power to overcome them. Esperanza's identity is transformed; in efforts to assimilate to her Mexican culture and the role of the Latino women, while living in the United States.

Esperanza goes through many events and has many thoughts relating to her discovery of her own identity. In chapter 3 page 8, Esperanza states, "Soy un globo rojo, un globo atado a un ancla." Esperanza believes she's accountable for her younger sister, Nenny, when they are looking for fun around the neighborhood with the other kids. She's always having to look after and worry for her little sister as if she is her. This prevents Esperanza from having friends, and therefore a personal life, of her own. She feels as if she's Nenny's security. Esperanza feels as though she can't be independent until Nenny gets older. In chapter 4 page 9, Esperanza explains, "Heredé su nombre, pero no quiero heredar su lugar junto a la ventana." Esperanza is named after her great-grandmother Esperanza, 'un caballo salvaje de una mujer' (page 8), who became broken after marrying. Before she was married she felt free and afterward felt like she couldn't be herself. Her great-grandmother felt alone. She 'miró por la ventana toda su vida' (page 8). She'd always just look out the window instead of exploring and experiencing life. She felt as though she was trapped. Esperanza wants her life to turn out differently. She doesn't want to end up like her great-grandmother which causes her to want to change her name so that she can define herself on her own terms. In addition, Esperanza is introduced to Marin, who is a neighbor of hers and is older. In chapter 11 page 15, Marin says, "Lo que importa ... es que los muchachos nos vean y que nosotros los veamos." Marin, who is older than Esperanza, thinks her only way to enhance your life is through marriage. She is more concerned with receiving attention from boys rather than forming friendships with other girls. She wears make-up to attract males and Esperanza views this as Marin being a mature and grown woman. In chapter 12 page 15, Esperanza believes, "Todo marrón alrededor, estamos a salvo." Outsiders who visit Mango Street fear people in her neighborhood, but Esperanza isn't scared by the skin color of her neighbors. People who just drive by are in fear because they assume the people in the neighborhood are dangerous based on their skin color. To Esperanza, everyone looks alike, so everyone feels safe. She realizes that there is racial prejudice within her society at this time. Later on in the novel, Esperanza is introduced to Alicia. Alicia is a hard-working student who wants to learn but is forced to take the role of her dead mother. In chapter 14 page 16, Alicia's father says, "La obligación de la mujer es dormir para que pueda levantarse temprano con la estrella de la tortilla." Alicia takes care of her family and household all while attending college, however, her father thinks a woman's place is in the home and not school. He discourages her from her studies so she can get enough rest to focus on the family. His attitude represents the common belief on Mango Street that a woman's place is in the home. In chapter 17 page 20, Esperanza says, "Hemos de ser Navidad." This is in relation to the fact

---

she and her friends Rachel and Lucy are all wearing heels. They are looked upon by the males in their community because the heels symbolize womanhood. Women are viewed as sexual objects when they wear them. The attention makes Esperanza feel special. To add, the girls are introduced to puberty and hips. In chapter 20 page 24, Esperanza notes, "Tienes que ensayar para saber qué hacer con caderas cuando las tengas." Esperanza, Lucy, and Rachel talk about what it means to have hips. Esperanza takes the lead in the conversation, acting more worldly and knowledgeable than she is. She wants the other girls to think she is sophisticated and womanly, however, she doesn't really know what she's talking about. In chapter 24 page 32, Elenita says to Esperanza, "Una casa nueva, una casa hecha de corazón." Elenita reads Esperanza's fortune. Esperanza wants to know if there's a better house in her future, but Elenita insists Esperanza's true home will be in her heart. Esperanza is disappointed because her dream is to live in better conditions than how her family is living now. She wants a big house and has grown tired of living in poverty. In chapter 25 page 32, the police say, "Simplemente otro ilegal. Ya sabes de cuales." Esperanza discusses the story of Geraldo, who was killed in a hit-and-run car accident. The case is dropped without any remorse. There was no further investigation after the belief that he was an undocumented immigrant. She believes this is how the police officers and medical people feel when a Mexican kid with no identification shows up in the emergency room. Geraldo doesn't receive proper care by doctors he just gets a medical intern who doesn't know exactly what she is doing. He could've been helped if seen by someone at a higher rank, but because he had no representation of himself he didn't get correct treatment resulting in his death. They automatically believe he is undocumented and doesn't care about him because he is not like them. Esperanza learns that they don't care for people like Geraldo, therefore, they don't care about Mexicans, which includes her. She feels as if she doesn't matter in America. She is shown racial prejudice in her society once again.

In chapter 34 Esperanza conveys her thoughts of why she doesn't want to travel with her family anymore. Esperanza's family likes to drive through the fancy neighborhoods and dream about what life could be like if they were rich. Esperanza sees no fun in this because it only reminds her of what she can't obtain because her family is in poverty. She craves for her life to be different and any reminders of what she wants but can't acquire cause her to feel envious, hurt eventually to lose hope. She doesn't believe she is living the "American Dream" which is to find success and happiness. Towards the end of the story, Esperanza gradually finds herself throughout all these events and struggles she has faced. In chapter 41 page 48, her sister says to her, "Tú siempre serás Esperanza. Tú siempre serás Mango Street." The sister cautions Esperanza that physically departing Mango Street doesn't mean she will forever leave it in the past. The people she's met and the experiences she's had on Mango Street have shaped her into who she is and will influence what she does in the future. She will always have the effect of living on Mango Street. She explains to Esperanza that she should honor Mango Street instead of dismissing it. Esperanza comes to realization with this. Lastly, Esperanza claims in chapter 44 page 50, "No sabrán, por ahora, que me he ido para volver, volver por los que se quedaron." Esperanza wants to leave not to escape, but to make it a better place for those who don't have the means to leave. This revelation demonstrates her understanding of how the neighborhood has impacted her life and her desire to help those who also dream of a free and independent life. She has finally discovered what she wants to do and is at peace with herself.

To conclude, Esperanza finds herself in the end. She had to open her eyes and observe what was around her to do so. In addition, the women she met along the way demonstrated different thoughts and perspectives on life. Esperanza was finally able to formulate all that she has learned through her journey into her own understanding. This led to Esperanza finding out what

---

her goal was in life and what she really wanted to accomplish. Esperanza wants to help others in her neighborhood instead of them continuously dreaming and hoping yet failing due to their race or where they come from. She wants people to overcome them just as she was able to.