

THE HOUSE ON MANGO STREET — BOOK REVIEW

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HNotes Ezine

During the summer, I have been reading a few small, unforgettable books. None of them has touched me deeper than *The House on Mango Street* by Mexican-American writer, Sandra Cisneros. Without a formal plot or lineal structure, I compare reading this book to browsing photographs that were taken during different moments of life and are well hidden and mixed up in a shoebox somewhere in the closet.

This is a story of belonging and not belonging. Narrated by young Esperanza, a girl growing up in a poor Mexican and Puerto Rican neighborhood in Chicago, *The House on Mango Street* is made up of vignettes that are neither poems nor stories, yet one way or another they focus on the importance of language. Each vignette is filled with symbolism and can stand on itself, so no matter where, when or how you read the book, you will never get lost.

Every couple of pages or so you will read a different vignette, some can be as happy as the laughter of a child running around a playground and others as devastating as the death of the person you love the most. Each vignette is focused on a specific theme and philosophy, as Esperanza is a smart girl with a unique mind.

For example, in the vignette “My Name” Esperanza seems to emphasize on the power of names and how they usually influence people's personalities, transform destinies and help individuals figure out who they are. In “Women by Windows”, Esperanza details how most of the women in Mango Street are a disturbing failure: some are married to abusive husbands, others are trapped in their apartments by their antequate fathers or spoiled children, and all sit by their windows looking out with tearful eyes, dreaming of a life they can never have. At the end, it is no surprise that Esperanza becomes a strong woman determined to end the cycle of poverty and patriarchal domination.

Realistic and very dramatic, *The House on Mango Street* is a needful read for those who have lived far from home and, most of all, for those who want to understand better the struggle of Mexican families exiled in the United States. This moving book gives a lot of importance to immigrant children, as contrary to what some may believe, kids do have a really hard time coping with their life circumstances in a place where they are both citizens and foreigners.