

The house on mango  
street by sandra  
cisneros: esperanza's  
growth



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Friends can help guide you through tough situations. But sometimes making decisions on your own can be better than what any friend can tell you.

Throughout Esperanza's growth during her year in *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, Esperanza experiences many tough situations and gains realizations on what life is like in Mango Street from Lucy, Sally, and Nenny. The growth that Esperanza displays specifically changes in certain areas, as her friends portray these thoughts and show Esperanza new ideas about growth, a general viewpoint on life, and sudden sexuality.

At the beginning of the novel, Esperanza, the main character, is not ready to transpire from the innocence of childhood. She is mostly uneducated about sex and says that boys and girls live in apart from each other no matter what. She believes so strongly about this that she cannot even talk to her brothers outside of the house because she does not want other people to see her interacting with boys (Cisneros 8). As she progresses throughout the novel, she begins to learn about what she can do to look prettier. Marin, one of Esperanza's best friends, teaches her important facts about boys, but the first major step in Esperanza's awakening of her sexuality is when she and Lucy, someone she met when she came to Mango Street, explore the neighborhood in beautiful high-heeled shoes.

In the chapter that introduces the shoes, Lucy, and Esperanza (and Rachel, Lucy's sister) are given three pairs of high-heeled shoes by the mother of the little foot family (Cisneros 40). At first, they stare at how long their legs look, and how different it is than their normal appearance (40). They feel attractive because they think they look older and more elegant. The freshness of this new experience wears off, however, when they wear the

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shoes and walk down to the corner store where the owner, Mr. Benny, tells them that the shoes are dangerous and that they better take them off (41). This frightens them and they run away. At this point, Lucy is becoming apparent of the problems that the shoes give Esperanza and Rachel. But later, a bum on the street tells Rachel that she looks pretty and offers her a dollar to kiss him (41). This frightens Lucy, who grabs her hand and the girls run all the way back to Mango Street and hide the shoes in a bag under the back porch (41). Because of the unwanted attention from multiple boys and men that they've received, they no longer wish to feel beautiful. So without Lucy's feeling, both Rachel and Esperanza could have been hurt by the shoes. But by taking the girls back to house on Mango Street, Esperanza learned that being beautiful is perhaps more dangerous than helpful. This first step of realization helped Esperanza because she figured out that boys were dangerous to pretty girls like Esperanza (if she wore the shoes).

In the novel, Esperanza improves her overall general view on life as Nenny, Esperanza's younger sister, is often considered Esperanza's responsibility, and though her integrity is a large cause of annoyance for Esperanza, it also shows Nenny's independence from everyone else. In many ways, Nenny is an irritating little sister. Esperanza must show Nenny to her friends and keep her away from naughty children, such as the Vargas kids (8). Nenny also has traits that Esperanza covers, including two names ("Nenny" is short for "Magdalena"), beautiful eyes, and glimmering, smooth hair (11). Though Nenny can be an inconvenience and a tag-a-long, and her actions frequently embarrass Esperanza, often showing her independence. When Esperanza, Rachel, and Lucy come up with chants about hips, Nenny sings old chants

that everyone already knows (52). On the same idea as that, when Rachel and Lucy describe clouds with creative metaphors, Nenny gives the clouds simple names like Jose and Alicia (36). Nenny's constant denial to be creative embarrasses Esperanza, but her choices show that she has her own way of living on Mango Street. In this sense, Nenny and Esperanza don't seem similar, but their gaps in age and social ability hide their basic similarities. Nenny and Esperanza laugh at the same things, even things that others don't understand are laughable. More importantly, Nenny and Esperanza are both dreamers. While Esperanza thinks of a world outside the neighborhood, Nenny turns the outside world into the neighborhood by giving the clouds the same names as her neighbors. She turns Mango Street into the midpoint of the galaxy, a place where she can be safe and free. From observing Nenny's tendency to do this, Esperanza is able to see what she is doing and obtain a larger perspective on what life is like without all of the conflict between school, friends, and sexual problems

When Esperanza begins wanting boys at the end of the novel and learns more about sexuality, she looks for a friend in Sally, someone who Esperanza looks up to, who boys seem to find attractive. Sally portrays the idea of being glamorous yet cruel, like the women Esperanza sees in movies. She leans against the fence at school and doesn't talk to anyone (82). Rumors about Sally's multiple boyfriends travel around the school, but Esperanza doesn't believe them. Instead, she thinks of Sally as someone who spends their time dreaming of leaving the neighborhood. Sally, however, is not always interested in making boys crazy and then pushing them away, as the women in the movies do. Instead, she feels safety and comfort in making

love with boys, feelings she does not find at home with her father who is abusive. Sally becomes a vital figure for Esperanza, as she represents a type of maturity that Esperanza finds interesting in her life. Sally appears to have control with her boyfriends, and Esperanza wants to learn Sally's ways. Shoes again explain sexuality, as Esperanza adores Sally's black suede shoes (82). Sally seems to get sadder every day as she walks home to her father. He tries to keep her stuck in the house because he is very religious and thinks her beauty means trouble (82). Esperanza idolizes Sally at this point still, and it is seemingly possible that she is beginning to choose Sally's path, at least for the moment. Rachel and Lucy will not ever appear in the novel anymore, as Esperanza wants to become Sally's best friend so all of the attention heads towards Sally. Sally's movements with boys make Esperanza uncomfortable, because at this point Esperanza is interested in sex only at a very minuscule level. Eventually, this discomfort becomes very prominent, and Sally ends up putting Esperanza in danger. Sally changes little over time, but Esperanza's understanding of Sally changes massively. Esperanza's experiences as Sally's friend make Esperanza understand that she has tried to grow up too fast. In the end, Sally is an awful role model figure in Esperanza's life.

Overall, the new ideas that Esperanza learns from her friends displays a large expansion of change from Esperanza's mindset from the beginning of the book to now. At the end of the book, she knows to be more careful about certain things that might seem minuscule in the moment, but later create a large impact on life. Through Cisneros's descriptive writing, Esperanza's friends show the new ideas via their personalities. Though friends ultimately

show you the way to success in difficult scenarios and teach you new ideas, you can learn more from yourself about life than what anybody else tells you.

## **Works Cited**

- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street* , Vintage Contemporaries, 1984.