

"the house on mango
street" by sandra
cisneros: issues of
mexican american
women



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Sandra Cisneros who in her book *The House on Mango Street*, tried to express the issues that Mexican American women had to live with every single day (Cisneros, 1991). Although many women have faced gender inequality at all levels, they can make the decision of enhancing their roles without cowing to gender inequality.

The House on Mango Street is a combination of vignettes that cannot be identified as either being stories or poems. The combination of these vignettes ensures more reader understanding.

The book is about Esperanza Cordero, a young girl who develops from a young girl into a young woman in the Chicago Chicano ghetto and the woes she faces during her development stages. The vignette unfolds during her twelfth year of existence in which she and her family move into a house in Mango Street (Cisneros, 2005). It provides a clear description of the kind of poverty and racial discrimination that the people of Mango Street were subjected into by the other races, as they were not pure Americans but Mexican Americans.

The novel is a clear indication of the relationship that Esperanza formulated with Lucy and Rachel.

This was an important relationship as its main role was to usher the girls together with Nelly into puberty. As Esperanza matures both physically and sexually, she discards the friendship of Lucy and Rachel in favor of Sally, who was more mature both physically and sexually. Sally uses men sexually to escape from her abusive father. Although Esperanza does not agree with her, she still keeps the friendship that is cut off when she is sexually abused

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in a carnival after being abandoned by Sally because of a boy (Cisneros, 2005). She starts to write poems as a means of escaping from her woes and shares them with the trustworthy older women of her street. After learning the anguish they have to face everyday due to gender inequality, she vows to leave the street to formulate a better future for herself. She however, realizes that in forging a better future for herself she would also be forging a better future for the ones she left behind, as she would come back later to offer the deserved freedom they had always longed for.

The vignette unfolds from the viewpoint of Esperanza, which presents to the reader the type of intimacy that would be absent if the author wrote about Esperanza instead. The reader is welcomed into her inner thoughts thus making him understand the decisions and actions that she carries out at a higher perspective. This can be elaborated by the part where she meets Sire and the other boys at the carnival. She asserts, ' They didn't scare me. They did, but I wouldn't let them know.' (Cisneros, 1991, Pg 70). This is a clear indication that she always assumed a strong demeanor before people that intimidated her, which she later translated into fear for the reader to understand her true feelings. In her Street, women were viewed as the lesser gender but through the reactions assumed by Esperanza, the reader comes to the understanding that women were stronger than they looked.

The major character in the novel is Esperanza as she is the character who is bestowed with the role of narrating the vignettes to the reader. The other minor character in the vignettes is Nelly, Esperanza's small sister with whom she plays with but feels that she is not mature enough due to her childish nature. Next comes Lucy and Rachel, the two sisters who have articulated a <https://assignbuster.com/the-house-on-mango-street-by-sandra-cisneros-issues-of-mexican-american-women/>

don't-care attitude into their lives thus endearing themselves to Esperanza (Bloom, 2010). Sally is the other minor character who contributes to Esperanza's maturity both sexually and physically. Sire, the boy who later assaults Esperanza together with his friends, plays the role of ushering her into discovering the talent that would enhance her escape from the oppressive life of Mango Street. The other minor characters include the older women of Mango Street, Esperanza's two brothers, Cathy who took her on a tour of the street and the other neighbors that encompassed the people of Mango Street.

The real protagonist incorporated into the novel is Esperanza because the whole story encompasses her narration of the life she lived from when she was a young girl to when she matured into a young woman. The novel is void of real antagonists but Esperanza can be identified as her own antagonist.

This is because the conflicts expressed in the story result from the misunderstanding exhibited by Esperanza where her life is concerned. In the novel, an instance is narrated of how she made fun of her sick aunt but she later regrets this due to the strong friendship that existed between them.

The tone and mood of the story is based on the tone adopted by Esperanza as well as the mood that she exhibits on different occasions. She assumes a joyous mood in ' Our Good Day' and a somber mood in ' Red Clowns'.

(Cisneros, 1991). The tone articulated into the whole novel is a Reminiscent Tone. Different types of figurative language are incorporated into the novel.

The type of language used in the first chapter of the book is poetic prose. In this case, the chapter is a monologue in which Esperanza narrates on the

house they moved into when they arrived at Mango Street. In this case, <https://assignbuster.com/the-house-on-mango-street-by-sandra-cisneros-issues-of-mexican-american-women/>

flashbacks are incorporated into the narration as a form of enlightening the reader on the different situations that Esperanza's family had been subjected into before deciding to live in the house at Mango Street. The narrator utilizes a complicated style in her narration because she jumps from one narration into an unrelated narration as a clear indication of the conflicts that were being experienced in her mind. There is no clear transition from one narration to the other (Bloom, 2010). A good example of this is seen when she jumps from narrating about the house they had moved to into narrating about her childhood that was filled with diverse woes.

The language used in the narrations sometimes takes up a lyrical style in which dialogue and description is incorporated. This is experienced in her narration of how the house she lived in looked like because it posed a sense of shame in her life. She asserts, ' It's small and red with tight steps in front and the windows so small you'd think they were holding their breath. Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in.' (Cisneros, 1991, Pg 20). In the case, he personifies the windows and the door to enhance the importance that she had attached into a good house in which she could later identify as a home. This personification is utilized to stand for the obstacles that were standing between Esperanza and her acquisition of a better future. Dialogue is utilized to bring more meaning into the narration and to bring out the feelings attached to the narration.

For example in, ' Where do you live? She asked. There, I said pointing up to the third floor. You live there? There. I lived there. I nodded'. (Cisneros, 1991, Pg 18). Dialogue in this case is utilized to bring out the tension in the <https://assignbuster.com/the-house-on-mango-street-by-sandra-cisneros-issues-of-mexican-american-women/>

conversation. Repetition is also incorporated into the dialogue as a means of emphasizing on the theme of the concept of home, which is mainly prevalent in the novel. Metaphors are prevalently utilized in the narration where the author incorporates it as a means of giving hints of what is going to take place later in the narration. The description of the smallness of the house is used as metaphor that stands for the developments of Esperanza during her transition from childhood to adulthood. Her virginity and the awakening curiosity about sexuality that she exhibited especially before the development of her friendship with Sally can be illustrated by the assertion, 'So swollen you have to push hard to get in'. (Cisneros, 1991, Pg 30). The premise of her attaining the ownership of a good house is a metaphor that is used to stand for attaining her independence as a woman in a world full of gender inequality.

Imagery is prevalent in the narration especially in instances where the narrator describes the types of hair that are contained in her family. She emphasizes on her mother's hair that she describes in detail. The description of the hair is meant to aid the reader in understanding the important role played by her mother in her life. This is a clear indication of the importance of women in the society though they are identified by the society as second-class citizens. The comfort she feels when she has physical contact with her mother is also touched on in her description of her mother's hair. She says that her mother's hair is 'sweet to put your nose into when she is holding you'. (Cisneros, 1991, Pg 40). The narrator also uses similes in her description to show a sense of nourishment, warmth and craving, which

would later translate into a natural solace thus she depicts, the warm smell of bread before you bake it."

Symbolism is a prevalent element in the narration, which aids in the acquisition of a deeper meaning of the novel. The shoes referred to in the narration; symbolize the adult femininity and sex, which translates to the conflict between sexual admiration due to attractiveness and the independence desires that are exhibited by Esperanza. The trees in the narration symbolize the sense of independence experienced by Esperanza as compared by the other older women from her street (Bloom, 2010). She is the only woman character who exhibits a sense of independence because the other women are trapped in one way or the other. The use of poetry to describe life in Mango Street symbolizes the need for the use of beautiful language in the description by women and the small girls in order to lessen the burden they are subjected to by the poor life prevalent in that street.

The narration incorporates different motifs. The first motif incorporated into the narration is names. Esperanza being the main character in the novel exhibits a single name while the other characters exhibit mixed names. This is employed in the elaboration of the different conflicts that the people of that street experience based on their different identities in terms of their lives, their neighborhood, their families and their country (Teacher's Pet Publications, 2000). It is an indication of the different cultures that are represented in the street. Falling is another motif that stands for the fear of failure that the people exhibit. Esperanza looks forward to flying away and never falling in the same manner that Meme fell. This is an indication that

she longs for the day that she would escape from the bondage of gender inequality.

The women at the windows, is a motif used to symbolize the inequalities that women have to face each day due to their gender inequality. It also symbolizes the sense of inadequacy experienced by the women in Mango Street (Cisneros, 2005). This spells the main reason why Esperanza is bent on escaping from the Street and later come back to bring freedom to the trapped women. The major themes articulated into the narration include sexuality vs. autonomy, the struggle for self-definition, racial segregation, gender inequality and the concept of home. Under the concept of home, Esperanza attaches a good home to the house that her father works, which is big and luxurious. She does not feel any sense of home in their little house. This steers her to the decision of escaping from Mango Street in search of the home that she had been longing for.

The description of the differences that existed between the girls and the boys bring out gender inequality in the narration. Esperanza emphasizes on the fact that boys and girls are bestowed with different roles. This provides less powers to women thus they should take the responsibility of protecting themselves from inequality. Esperanza in this case works towards empowering the women as a means for eradicating gender inequality. Racial segregation is brought out by the inhabitants of Chicago who are plagued with poverty due to the discrimination they face from other races (Teacher's Pet Publications, 2000). Chicago is a state that is plagued with racial segregation to date. The struggle for self-definition is brought out through the conflicts that the inhabitants of Mango Street exhibit. Instead of <https://assignbuster.com/the-house-on-mango-street-by-sandra-cisneros-issues-of-mexican-american-women/>

exhibiting good names, they exhibit mixed names and this is a clear indication of their struggle for self-definition.

Esperanza being both the protagonist and the antagonist exhibits signs of a struggle for self-definition through the conflicts that plague her mind everyday. Sexuality vs. autonomy is prevalent especially in the case where Esperanza wants to acquire her independence and live in the house she has been longing for (Bloom, 2010). At the same time, she combines this with the need for finding a good man but she later realizes that she cannot attain the two goals at the same time. The two goals are mutually exclusive as exhibited by the older women of Mango Street who are trapped in marriages, though they possess the homes they wanted. She however chooses autonomy over sexuality when she concentrates on writing rather than boys.

Women especially in minority races have been faced predominantly with gender inequality. Some have taken the role of enhancing the elimination of that evil and they have worked very hard to mobilize the others in adoption of their ideologies. The House on Mango Street is a good example of the gender inequality that the Mexican American women have been facing in their lives (Cisneros, 1991). The narrator in the novel however looks for ways of changing this norm but she is faced with many obstacles on her way. The novel utilizes different elements, themes and motifs in bringing out the point that women can be empowered to eradicate gender inequality. This is brought out by the fact that Esperanza believes that when she escapes from her hometown she will return later to mobilize the other women towards eradicating gender inequality. Although she does not leave at the climax of the novel, noble ideologies have been born in her mind towards empowering

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her fellow women. In conclusion, although many women have faced gender inequality at all levels, they can make the decision of enhancing their roles without cowing to gender inequality.