

The theme of finding home and its symbolism



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The House on Mango Street is a story told through the observations of Esperanza, a girl of Latino heritage, as she views the world around her. Esperanza interprets the world she sees around her on Mango Street while paying special attention to the women she observes. She views everything from the language barrier these women face to their oppressed status. With these observations, Esperanza attempts to map out her own life using the examples she sees around her. However, she comes to realize she desires a life that is different from those she observes on Mango Street, so in the end she points out the differences between herself and the people around her in order to highlight the fact that she will leave Mango Street and has the means to do so. Through her observational perspective and documentation, Esperanza proves to have a voice with her mastery of language and writing, which awards her control over her life and the possibility of finding a true home.

The best piece of advice that Esperanza receives is from Aunt Lupe: “ You just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free” (Cisneros 61). The language barrier serves as a major hindrance to the characters in the story. When describing Mamacita, Esperanza observes, “ Somebody said because she’s too fat, somebody because of the three flights of stairs, but I believe she doesn’t come out because she is afraid to speak English, and maybe this is so since she only knows eight words” (Cisneros 77). Everyone else in the community finds other reasons for this woman’s withdrawn status while Esperanza sees that language itself can hold a person back. In Mamacita’s case, it even separates her from her child as her son begins to learn English. Esperanza also points

out that her father faced a similar problem when he first came to America. He only knew how to say “ hamandeggs,” so for the three months that was all he was able to eat. With this strong emphasis on language, the author is identifying a source of power by which to overcome one’s circumstances. She realizes the importance of learning and knowing the language well. In this realization, she is justifying her writing and conveying that her published writing alone signifies that she has attained a bit of freedom and claimed a small amount of control over her own life.

This theme of having control over one’s life permeates the story as Esperanza observes the women in the story as having very little control over their own lives. She observes Sally being trapped in her home by an abusive and overprotective father. She sees Rafaela whose husband keeps her locked in the house as he goes out. Through these observations, Esperanza is seeing how life turns out for the women on Mango Street and longs for her life to be different. However, her observations do not quench her sexual curiosity. She first experiments with being beautiful as she tries on the high heels but deems it too tiring. Later, she is curious about boys and voices her curiosity as she observes Sire. She parades herself in front of him because, as she states, “ I had to prove to me I wasn’t scared of nobody’s eyes, not even his” (Cisneros 72). She has control over this situation because she is still simply observing his reaction to her. However, she also discovers that such a reaction exists and is further intrigued. However, in “ Red Clowns,” she has no control over the situation. In fact, the sexual encounter is strictly about control rather than love or tenderness as she was led to believe. She claims, “ Sally, you lied, you lied. He wouldn’t let me go. He said I love you, I

love you, Spanish girl" (Cisneros 100). Esperanza sees this as the first step to a life like the women of Mango Street because she had no control and was under the control of a man. This ends her attempts to be "beautiful and cruel." She deems relationships as simply a form of control that will give her a life like the women on Mango Street have and she does not want that, so she ceases her attempts to initiate relationships and get married like the other girls.

Esperanza's perspective on both the lives around her and what she considers to be home reveal the differences between her and those around her on Mango Street and award her a small amount of control over her own life. She tells the stories of those around her through personal observation. In doing so, she sets herself apart from everyone. She is able to observe the women around her and view their lives as possible patterns for her own. However, she voices her desire to leave Mango Street and in turn her desire to have a life different from lives of the women around her. She wants control over her own life. The most striking difference between her and the women around her is the perspective she has on what she considers home. When Esperanza speaks about Mamacita and her longing for home, she interprets Mamacita's thoughts to be, "Home is a house in a photograph" (Cisneros 77). To this woman, home is something that is in the past; it is something that has been left behind and only survives in a photograph. Mamacita has been taken out of the place where she feels she belongs. Esperanza differs in that she has never belonged anywhere. When talking to Alicia, she claims, "No, this isn't my house I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I've lived here. I don't belong. I don't ever want to come from here... I never had

a house, not even a photograph...only one I dream of" (Cisneros 107). While the women on Mango Street know they do not want to be there, they see their home in their past while Esperanza sees her home in the future. Instead of spending time reminiscing on something with the goal of reclaiming it, Esperanza can strive to create the home she has imagined. The past cannot be reclaimed, but the future is undecided and therefore belongs to those with a voice and the will to change or influence it. This knowledge awards Esperanza a small bit of control over her life because with her mastery of the language and writing, she has a voice to shape her future and leave Mango Street and the life it seems to have laid out for her.