A black and white close-up portrait of Sandra Cisneros, looking slightly to the left with a gentle smile. Her dark, curly hair frames her face.

THE
AMERICAN PLACE
THEATRE
LITERATURE
TO LIFE[®]

The House on Mango Street

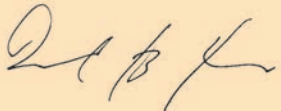
by Sandra Cisneros

TEACHER'S RESOURCE GUIDE

LITERATURE TO LIFE® is a performance-based literacy program that presents professionally staged verbatim adaptations of significant American literary works. The program gives students a new form of access to literature by bringing to life the world of the book with performances that create an atmosphere of discovery and spark the imagination. *Literature to Life* encourages reading, writing, and critical thinking and provides a catalyst for learning and self-expression.

This *Literature To Life* Teacher's Resource Guide was written by professional teaching artists with vast experience implementing effective, hands-on strategies in the classroom. It is designed for educators to introduce drama-in-education to their students, as both a pre- and post-*Literature to Life* performance guide. The activities presented meet the Learning Standards for English and the Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts. The exercises can be adapted (simplified or extended) according to the students' special needs, maturity, interests, and abilities.

Forging the connection between theatre, literature and education is no longer a privilege—it is our responsibility as educators to not only open these doors, but to charge through them with purpose and certitude.



David Kener, Executive Director
The American Place Theatre

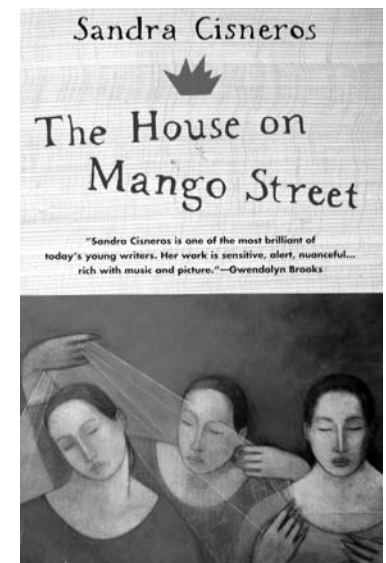
All excerpts from *Black Boy* by Richard Wright are reprinted here with permission. The text for the *Literature to Life* performance of *Black Boy* is taken directly from the book. All rights reserved.
Photography by Paul Coughlin and AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS.



Theatre Etiquette

To make the theatre-going experience more enjoyable for everyone, a code of behavior has been established. When attending theatrical performances, remember these simple rules of conduct.

- Be on time for the performance.
- Do not eat, drink, or chew gum in the theatre.
- Turn off all cellular phones and pagers.
- Be sure to use the restroom BEFORE the pre-show discussion begins.
- Talk before and after the performance only. Remember that the people near you and on stage can hear you.
- Be an active participant in the pre- and post- show discussions in order to further deepen your experience with *Literature to Life*.
- Appropriate responses to the performances, such as laughing and applauding, are appreciated.
- Act with maturity during romantic, violent, and other challenging scenes.
- Do not leave after the performance, a post-show discussion will follow including a Q&A with the actor.
- Open your eyes, ears, and mind to the entire theatrical experience!



The following exercises are designed to be used BEFORE seeing the play!

Section 1: Introduction

About the Author

Objectives:

- The students will learn about Sandra Cisneros's life.
 - The students will write interview questions based on Sandra Cisneros's life.
-



SANDRA CISNEROS (born December 20, 1954 in Chicago) is an author and poet best known for her novel *The House on Mango Street*. Cisneros was the third among seven children and the only daughter. During childhood her family moved through a series of apartments in the poor neighborhoods of Chicago's south side. While she was a teenager, her family realized its dream of purchasing a house, although she considered it ugly and shabby. This event likely inspired much of *The House on Mango Street*. Her family frequently traveled between Mexico and the United States. Cisneros's writing reflects her Mexican-American heritage, with Latino themes and Spanish words infused into the English. Cisneros has said that she is trying to fill a literary void by writing stories that haven't been written yet. She acknowledges that her experience as the only daughter in a working-class, Mexican-American family of six sons has deeply influenced her writing and critics have noted a distinctly feminine perspective in her compelling vignettes of the lives of Chicanos and other Latinos.

Sandra Cisneros lives in the King William Historical District of San Antonio Texas in a house which she painted purple. Her act generated a mini-firestorm in the community, because many of the residents in King William considered her contemporary color scheme inappropriate for this historic district.

Cisneros states: *"The issue is bigger than my house. The issue is about historical inclusion. I want to paint my house a traditional color, but please give me a broader palette than surrey beige, sevres blue, hawthorn green, frontier days brown, and Plymouth Rock grey . . . I thought I had painted my house a historic color. Purple is historic to us. It only goes back a thousand years or so to the pyramids. It is present in the Nahua codices, book of the Aztecs, as is turquoise, the color I used for my house trim; the former color signifying royalty, the latter, water and rain."*

Nevertheless, Sandra Cisneros won the battle and has been permitted to keep her lavender colored house intact.

Exercise

Provide each student with a copy of the biography of Sandra Cisneros. After everyone has read it, have students compile lists of questions that they would want to ask Ms. Cisneros about her life and influences. Have a volunteer play Sandra Cisneros and, with the help of the class, answer some of the questions on the other student's lists.

As an extension have students play members of the community where Ms. Cisneros' painted her house purple—encourage students to debate the controversy of her color choice.

Discussion

- What does Ms. Cisneros' choice of color for her real life house say about her personality?
- Does this color choice tell us anything about her book, *The House on Mango Street*?
- What does Ms. Cisneros mean when she defends her house by saying "The issue is about historical inclusion"?
- If you could paint your house any color which color would you choose?

Introduction to the Text

Objective: Students will be introduced to excerpts from *The House on Mango Street* as preparation for viewing the Literature to Life performance.

The following are excerpts from the first chapter of the book *The House on Mango Street*. Direct the students to find it on pages 3-5 of their texts and read it with your students as preparation for the performance.

Passage A:

We didn't always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that I can't remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot...

Passage B:

We had to leave the flat on Loomis quick. The water pipes broke and the landlord wouldn't fix them because the house was too old. We had to leave fast. We were using the washroom next door and carrying water over in empty milk gallons. That's why Mama and Papa looked for a house, and that's why we moved into the house on Mango Street, far away, on the other side of town.

They always told us that one day we would move into a house, a real house that would be ours for always so we wouldn't have to move each year. And our house would have running water and pipes that worked. And inside it would have real stairs, not hallway stairs, but stairs inside like the houses on T.V...

Passage C:

But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all. It's small and red with tight steps in front and 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... Out back is a small garage for the car we don't own yet and a small yard that looks smaller between the two buildings on their side. There are stairs in our house, but they're ordinary hallway stairs, and the house has only one washroom...

Passage D:

Once when we were living on Loomis, a nun from my school passed by and saw me playing out front...

Where do you live? she asked.

There, I said pointing up to the third floor.

*You live **there**?*

***There.** I had to look where she pointed – the third floor, the paint peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn't fall out. You live **there**? The way she said it made me feel like nothing. **There.** I lived **there.** I nodded.*

I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it... (pp. 3-5)

Discussion:

- Why did Esperanza “feel like nothing” after her conversation with the nun?
- What does Esperanza mean when she says she has to have a “real house”?
- What do you think about Esperanza’s dissatisfaction with the house on Mango Street?
- Why do you think Esperanza wants a house “like the houses on TV”?
- What does home mean to you?
- Are there any examples of figurative language in this excerpt?

The Name Game

Objectives:

- Students will consider the origin and meaning of their name.
- Students will do creative writing on the subject of their name.

The following is an excerpt from “The House on Mango Street,” the fourth chapter of the book *My Name*. Direct the students to find it on pages 10-11 of their texts and read it with your students as preparation for the performance.

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.

I would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.

Discussion:

- Why would someone want to rename themselves?
- What do Esperanza’s choices of alternative names say about her personality?
- If you could rename yourself what name would you choose?
- Are there any examples of figurative language in this excerpt?

Writing Exercise

Instruct students to do a free write on their name following Esperanza’s example. Students should consider the following in their writing: 1. Who gave you your name? What language does it come from? What does your name originally mean? Are you named after someone? How well does your name “fit” you? If you were going to rename yourself what name would you choose? Could you find different names for different parts of your personality?

Thematic Writing

The following questions can be used for discussion, essay or creative writing topics as a way to familiarize students with the text and begin considering themes prior to the performance.

1. Read “Those Who Don’t,” from *The House on Mango Street* (Pg. 28) What do you think is the perception of your neighborhood by outsiders? Do you think that this is an accurate perception? Is there a neighborhood in your city that you have preconceived ideas about? What is your impression and where did that idea come from?
2. A character from *The House on Mango Street* tells the main character Esperanza that writing “will keep you free.” In what ways is writing an avenue for freedom? What does freedom mean to you? What form of expression keeps you free? (writing, sports, music, etc.) Why?
3. Sandra Cisneros has been quoted as saying that she is trying to fill a literary void by writing stories that haven’t been written yet. Whose story do you think needs to be told? What is the best medium to tell their story? (literature, music, art, film, theater, other)

Cultural Mapping

Objectives:

- Students will gain knowledge of similarities and differences in their classmates.
- Students will consider how location affects who we are.

Activity:

Ask the students to move the desks to the side and stand in a circle.

Describe the room as a map of the world. Identify where your city is on the map. Have students who were born in your city stand on that spot on the map. Have the other students group themselves according to their birthplace (north, east, south or west of your city). Ask each group to determine two additional things that all group members have in common. Discuss their experience of finding commonalities.

The following exercises are designed to be used AFTER seeing the play!

Section 2: The world of *The House on Mango Street*

Home for Sale

Objectives:

- Students will cooperatively analyze and share images/expectations of home and neighborhood.
- Students will discuss the importance of one's home / neighborhood and determine its influence on one's life.
- Students will gain confidence and self-esteem through active participation with peers.

Activity:

The Teacher assumes the role of a bossy, highly motivated, powerful advertising CEO (Teacher-In-Role) and addresses the class as if they were the company's executives. Begin with the following paragraph:

We have just been hired by the government to start a huge advertising campaign that promotes residential housing in the city's Mango Street section. I've arranged all executives in creative teams. YOU'VE GOT FIVE MINUTES TO DEVELOP A SLOGAN THAT WILL GET PEOPLE TO BUY A *HOUSE ON MANGO STREET!*

Furthermore, I want each team to create a frozen image that could be photographed and printed in the newspaper with a caption to match it. Ask the students to share their work.

Discussion:

- What kind of images did these advertisements show?
- Which were realistic given what we know about Mango Street from the book? What kind of reality did they show?
- How would Esperanza have represented Mango Street?
- What kind of appeal did these advertisements (tableaux/slogan) use to attract people to Mango Street? Which would be most successful and why?

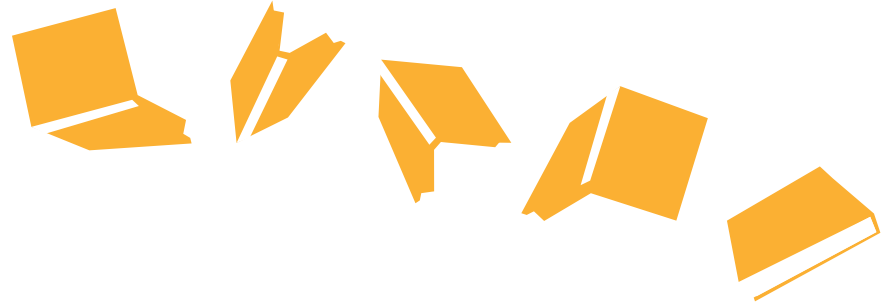
Haunted House

Objectives:

- Students will gain insight to the family/home structure through Writing-In-Role.
- Students will investigate the use of a writer's Point of View to create a particular "voice" (tone) for a piece of text.

Activity:

Instruct students to imagine themselves as the house in which they live. From the first-person Point Of View, students will write what life is like inside these walls. Consider how the house views its inhabitants. Students may write in prose (i.e. a monologue) or poetic verse. Also, teachers might want to point out the term, "PERSONIFICATION" as the process in which a writer provides human qualities to inanimate objects.



Sound Effects

Objectives:

- Students will identify and reproduce the sounds that are distinct in their neighborhood.
- Students will gain an understanding of how the senses influence our experience of a place.

Activity A:

Divide the class into groups. Each group brainstorms the sounds in their home or school neighborhood. Encourage them to picture different times of day and night.

Each group will create a day in their neighborhood told only through sound (Ex. Morning sounds: street cleaning, kids going to school. Afternoon sounds: music traffic, Evening sounds: the wind, television). Students can use their voices and found/improvised instruments.

Share scenes.

Activity B:

Discuss the sounds on Mango Street and create a sound effect story using the whole class. Refer to the text for specific sound references such as “songs like sobbing” and “laughter like tin.” Bring a day on Mango Street to life with sound using voices and found/improvised instruments.

Discussion:

Does the sound of a place influence the neighborhood?



The Hood

Objectives:

- Students will interpret their neighborhood through group activity.
- Students will develop a greater awareness of their environment through analyzing the interpretations of others.
- Students will provide details about a particular character to increase understanding and sensitivity.

Activity:

Collage – Through the many vignettes in *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros creates a mosaic of the different people in Esperanza's neighborhood. Divide the class into four groups. Ask each to create a piece of art about the people in their own neighborhoods through one of the following mediums: mural, poetry, sound/music, and movement/dance. Each group presents its work to the others.

Writing Project – Ask students to identify one person in their neighborhood whom they would like to know more about. Have them write a character portrait using what they know about the person and also imagining what they don't know. The following questions can be used as guidelines for their writing:

- How does this person walk? What does s/he wear?
- How many people are in this person's family?
- Describe his/her relationship with parents.
- Does s/he work and if so where?
- What are his/her plans and dreams for the future?
- Does s/he have any regrets? Any secrets?

Collect and bind the students' writing in a magazine. Ask students to give the magazine a title that accurately reflects the project.

Internal Monologue

Objectives:

- Students will analyze and creatively express interpretations of character by improvising internal monologues.
- Students will cooperatively create images that further clarify characters and relate them to new situations.

Esperanza writes the following about the great-grandmother after whom she was named:

"She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window." (p. 11)

Discussion:

- Why doesn't Esperanza want to inherit her grandmother's place by the window?
- What is she saying about women's lives?
- What does Esperanza want for her own life that is different from her grandmother's?
- Is there anyone in your life who "sits their sadness on an elbow"?
- How do we learn from past generations?

Activity:

Ask for a volunteer to portray Esperanza's great-grandmother. Then ask for another volunteer to come up and "mold" the student playing the grandmother into the position of her sitting by the window (TABLEAUX). It's helpful to think of this activity as a sculptor creating a sculpture. Encourage the sculptor to be as specific as possible including facial expression. Give several students the opportunity to sculpt.

Ask the class to imagine what the great-grandmother is thinking as she sits by the window. Then signal them one-by-one to speak her thoughts aloud (INTERNAL MONOLOGUE).

Divide the class into five groups. Ask each group to create two tableaux: the first depicting the great-grandmother in a scene that shows her life as it is and the second depicting the great-grandmother being one of the "things she wanted to be." Each group should give each of their tableaux a title. Groups share their tableaux in turn. Discuss the difference between the two sets of tableaux. Discuss the steps that would have been necessary for Esperanza's Great-Grandmother to go from image #1 to image #2?

Closure:

Ask students to spend 5-10 minutes free-writing about anything in their lives that might relate to the discoveries made today involving characters.

Coming Home

Objectives:

- Students will relate the novel's theme of a "circle" to their own lives.
- Students will creatively think about their own future vision.
- Students will consider how their neighborhood has contributed to who they are.

Pre-Text:

In *The House on Mango Street*, the sister with marble hands tells Esperanza:

When you leave you must remember always to come back ... When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are ... You must remember to come back. For the ones who cannot leave as easily as you. (p. 105)

Discussion:

- What does the sister mean when she says Esperanza must remember to come back?
- What is she advising Esperanza to do?
- Is it important for people who achieve success to go back to their neighborhoods?
- What does she mean by "a circle"?
- Do you know someone from your neighborhood who has left? Who has left and then come back?

Activity:

Graduation Speech: Imagine that it is 20 years in the future and you have been asked to come back to your school to deliver the graduation speech. What would you tell the graduating students about how your old neighborhood helped shape the person you have become? What memories would you share? What advice would you offer the graduates for their future?

Neighborhood Interviews

Objectives:

- Students will gain an appreciation of oral histories by interviewing each other.
- Student will develop listening, recording and writing skills.
- Students will gain an appreciation of differing perspectives.

Activity:

Have the class practice taking oral histories by interviewing each other.

Then have each student select one of their neighbors to interview. The interview should focus on the neighborhood, including the residents' feelings about the neighborhood and history in this neighborhood.

Using the interview, have the students create a vignette in the style of *The House on Mango Street*. Have students give their piece a descriptive title. (Ex. "Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark")

Have the students try to recreate the person physically and vocally. Have students add music and/or costume pieces.

Discussion:

- What common themes emerge?
- What do people value in their neighborhoods?

Section 3: Follow-Up

Writing A Critical Review

Activity:

Imagine that you are the theatre critic for a major newspaper. Your job is to attend performances and review them for the public. You have your own column and byline.

You have been asked to write a review of *The House on Mango Street*. Include in your review the following information:

- The name of the Theatre
- The name of the actor, director, writer, playwright, and education facilitators.
- The date you attended
- What you think about the performance

Before beginning to work on your review, read the reviews of theatre productions in newspapers. Cut out those that interest you and bring them to class. Note the style the critic uses as well as the content as you discuss the checklist.

To prepare your review, consider responding to the following questions:

- What do you want to tell your readers about this play?
- What were some of the most memorable moments in the play?
- What were the surprising moments in the play?
- Was the actor believable or non-believable?
- How suitable is the play for young audiences and does it strike a chord with realities that youth face today?
- Why would you recommend it or not recommend it?
- On a scale of one to five, five being the highest, what rating will you give the play?

Decide how you wish to organize the material, sketch out your review, and begin writing.

After completing the first draft, read the review to yourself. Evaluate the choices you made in terms of content focus, style, and tone. Writing is synonymous with revising, so make any changes that will strengthen your writing. Upon making changes, begin writing a second draft. Again, read to yourself for possible revisions. Type or neatly print your final version in the form of a newspaper review column.



Bibliography

Drama-in-Education Resources

- Bailey, Sally Dorothy. *Wings to Fly*. (Woodbine House, 1993)
- Boal, Augusto. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. (Routledge; 2nd ed., 2002)
- Erion, Polly. *Drama in the Classroom*. (Lost Coast Press, 1996)
- Heathcote, Dorothy and Gavin Bolton. *Drama for Learning*. (Heinemann Drama, 1995)
- Morgan, Norah and Juliana Saxton. *Teaching Drama*. (Heinemann, 1987)
- Neelands, Jonathan. *Making Sense of Drama*. (Heinemann Drama, 1985)
- Neelands, Jonathan. *Structuring Drama Work*. (Cambridge University Press, 2nd ed., 2000)
- O'Neill, Cecily and Alan Lambert. *Drama Structures*. (Trans-Atlantic Publications, 1982)
- O'Neill, Cecily and Cris Warner. *Structure and Spontaneity*. (Trentham Books, 2005)
- Spolin, Viola. *Theater Games for the Classroom*. (Northwestern University Press, 1986)
- Sklar, Daniel Judah. *Playmaking*. (Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1990)
- Sternberg, Patricia and Antonina Garcia. *SocioDrama*. (Praeger Paperback March 30, 2000)
- Wagner, Betty Jane. *Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a Learning Medium*. (Heinemann, Rev. ed., 1999)
- Zimmerman, Suzi. *Introduction to Theatre Arts Teacher's Guide*. (Meriwether Publishing, 2004)

Book References

- Sandra Cisneros - www.sandracisneros.com
- Interview with Sandra Cisneros - <http://wiredforbooks.org/sandracisneros/>

The House on Mango Street. Copyright © 1984 by Sandra Cisneros. Published by Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., New York and in hardcover by Alfred A Knopf in 1994.

We Want to Hear from YOU and your STUDENTS!

THE AMERICAN PLACE THEATRE

266 WEST 37TH STREET, FLOOR 22, NEW YORK, NY 10018

p 212.594.4482 • f 212.594.4208

EDU@AMERICANPLACETHEATRE.ORG

WWW.AMERICANPLACETHEATRE.ORG

WWW.LITERATURETOLIFE.ORG



What to Do After You See the Performance

Please encourage your students to reflect on the play in some of the following ways. We would love to have copies of some of the writings or artwork your students create!

Write

- Write a letter to the actor, director, or teaching artist in response to the play.
- Write a letter to the author Sandra Cisneros in response to the novel.
- Write a monologue from the point of view of Esperanza, or as one of the other characters in *The House on Mango Street*.
- Write an epilogue. For example, what happens to Esperanza after the story ends?
- Write your own theatrical adaptation for a few of the vignettes in *The House on Mango Street* that were not included in our production.

Draw

- Draw the world of Mango Street as Esperanza might see it.
- Draw the world of Mango Street as you see it or as you imagined it while viewing our production.
- Draw a poster for our production of *The House on Mango Street*.
- Create a collage of images from magazines in response to the play or the novel.

Wynn Handman, Artistic Director/Co-Founder

David Kener, Executive Director

Jennifer Barnette, Managing Director

Gwen Brownson, Arts-Education Manager