

Exploring the Power of Voice and Writing in Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*

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Abstract

The power of voice and writing is a key concept in Sandra Cisneros's novel *The House on Mango Street*. The novel moves around Esperanza a young Latina girl as she navigates the complexities of growing up in a poor urban neighbourhood. Despite the hardships her story unfolds through poetically crafted vignettes often incorporated in Spanglish language. Esperanza uses her writing to carve out her ideas and resist the limitations imposed on her by her socio-economic background and gender. Through her writing Esperanza imagines a life beyond the confines of Mango Street. The novel explores how Esperanza's self-expression and storytelling empower her to confront and transcend cultural and gender constraints.

Keywords: cultural heritage, complexities of life, resistance, gender constraints, selfexpression, freedom, personal identity

Sandra Cisneros is a poet, short story writer, novelist, and essayist, whose work explores the lives of the working class. *The House on Mango Street*, first published in 1984. The novel intricately weaves elements of Mexican-American culture with themes of social class, race, sexuality, identity, and gender. Cisneros is a dual citizen of the United States and Mexico, and currently lives in central Mexico. Cisneros' works often employ an episodic structure, as seen in *The House on Mango Street*, where each vignette stands alone but also contributes to a larger narrative.

In *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros displays how powerful the words are. The vignettes, "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut and Papaya Juice on Tuesdays" and "Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes" are the main sections out of the book that show the power of writing. Furthermore, the voice of the writings gives a clearer perception of the subject it teaches. Being able to write is extremely valuable because the writer can inform numerous people, they can also express their feelings through words and can describe objects without others experiencing them. Lastly, writing is extremely powerful and when used right, can inspire others.

The novel *The House on Mango Street* draws heavily from Cisneros own life,

making Esperanza's journey a reflection of her own struggles and aspirations. Sandra Cisneros and her character Esperanza share many similarities, particularly in their thoughts and experiences. Both Cisneros and Esperanza grapple with their cultural identity and the sense of belonging. Growing up in a predominantly Latino community, they experience the tension between their Mexican heritage and the broader American culture. They both challenge the societal norms that dictate how women should behave and what they can achieve. At the end of the novel, Esperanza's voice and writing serve as powerful forms of resistance, enabling her to assert her identity and challenge the constraints placed upon her. Her journey reflects the transformative power of storytelling and the importance of giving voice to marginalized experiences.

The patriarchal society enforces strict gender roles that confine women to domestic spaces and responsibilities. Esperanza observes how women in her neighbourhood are expected to marry young, bear children, and remain subservient to their husbands. This expectation stifles their dreams and ambitions. Through her writing, Esperanza articulates her desire to break free from these traditional roles and pursue her own path. She witnesses the oppression and subjugation of women around her, including her own family members and neighbours. Women like Minerva and Sally experience physical and emotional abuse at the hands of men. These harsh realities fuel Esperanza's determination to resist such a fate. Her writing becomes a powerful tool to voice her resistance against oppression and to imagine a life where women can live freely and autonomously. The limited access to education for women and girls in Esperanza's neighbourhood reflects broader cultural and socioeconomic norms.

Esperanza is seen as a first-generation learner in the novel by Sandra Cisneros. She grows up in a working-class Mexican-American community where educational opportunities are limited, and many of her family members and neighbours do not pursue higher education. Esperanza's aspirations to become a writer and to escape the constraints of her environment mark her as someone who is breaking new ground for herself and her family.

Traditional gender norms frequently constrain women in *The House on Mango Street*, where they confront serious issues like economic reliance, domestic violence, and limited opportunities. Mango Street's social and cultural norms restrict women's independence and opportunity by upholding patriarchal ideals. Writing empowers women by allowing them to express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It empowers them by reclaiming their narratives and asserting their identities. Writing also provides a space for reflection,

connecting with others who share similar experiences, and fostering solidarity. It also serves as a means of resistance against oppressive structures, allowing women to envision alternative futures and challenge the existing condition.

Cisneros faced significant challenges in her journey as a writer, many of which stemmed from her unique background. She was indeed a first-generation learner in the sense that she pursued a path in higher education that was uncommon in her family. Born to a Mexican father and Mexican-American mother, Cisneros grew up in a household where education and creativity were not traditional focuses, especially for women. Her struggles were deeply intertwined with navigating her cultural heritage, financial constraints and societal expectations. She often felt that her experiences as a Latina woman were not reflected in the literature she encountered during her formal education. It took time and perseverance for her to realize that her unique perspective was precisely what gave her writing its power.

Cisneros encountered several difficulties as a child growing up in a low-income, working- class Mexican-American household, such as financial difficulties, cultural exclusion, and gender norms. Her desire to use writing to communicate her own and her community's struggles was encouraged by these encounters. She was motivated to give voice to the Chicana experience by her strong sense of cultural identity and pride in her Mexican- American ancestry. Through her stories, she aimed to clarify assumptions and promote the diversity and depth of her culture. Writing became a means of empowerment, allowing them to envision and work towards a better future for themselves and their communities. Their commitment to advocating for marginalized voices and challenging societal norms motivated them to use storytelling as a powerful tool for change.

Sandra Cisneros uses poetic language to capture the beauty, pain, and complexity of life on Mango Street, highlighting the emotional and psychological depths of the characters. The poetic language in the novel heightens the emotional impact of the narrative. Cisneros through his character Esperanza brings out how writing is deeply intertwined with her quest for personal identity and freedom in a society that seeks to define and limit women's freedom.

The House on Mango Street contains many small poems and references to emphasize the importance of language not only to Esperanza but also to her neighbours. These references include jump-roping chants, and simple, internal rhymes within paragraphs of the text. The abundance of poetry suggests that the women and girls on

Mango Street try to make their lives better by describing the world with beautiful language. The novel itself, with its many internal rhymes, is in some ways Esperanza's attempt to make some of the unpoetic aspects of her life less hard and more ordered through poetry.

Cultural and social pressures reinforce the patriarchal norms. Esperanza experiences these pressures, but she uses her writing to challenge and critique the cultural norms that seek to restrict her freedom. Esperanza is acutely aware of the limited choices available to her and other girls in her community due to the patriarchy. She writes about her dreams of becoming a writer and owning a house, aspirations that defy the expectations placed upon her. Her writing serves as a means to envision and work towards a future where she can achieve these dreams. Through her stories and poems, she creates a narrative of empowerment and resistance.

For Esperanza, writing poetry becomes an act of empowerment. It gives her agency to confront her circumstances and imagine a life beyond Mango Street. The poetic language used in the novel often invites readers to read between the lines. It encourages Esperanza's journey of self-discovery and enables her to reflect on her experiences, her desires, and envision a better future. Through poetry, Esperanza not only finds her voice but also crafts her identity “. . . she writes poems on little pieces of paper that she folds over and over and holds in her hands a long time, little pieces of paper that smell like a dime” (84).

Cultural background often shapes an author's perspective, experiences, and worldview. Esperanza's mixed cultural identity is seen in her use of both Spanish and English languages. The novel's multilingual language represents her capacity to balance her Mexican roots with her American environment. By embracing both languages she acknowledges and celebrates the richness of her cultural background while also asserting her place in American society. She is linguistically flexible and adaptable as seen by her multilingual expression. The blending of languages also mirrors her internal journey of self-discovery as she learns to reconcile and integrate different aspects of her identity.

Esperanza's poetic style is deeply reflective. Her poetry frequently incorporates cultural references and bilingual elements, reflecting her Mexican-American heritage. She blends Spanish and English seamlessly, creating a unique linguistic texture that adds depth to her work. Her poems often tell a story or capture a moment in her life, providing insight into her thoughts and feelings. Esperanza's spiritual freedom may eventually give her the power to be literally free as well. She uses her words to express her desire for

personal agency, a sense of self, and a future beyond the constraints of her current reality.

Esperanza despised living on Mango Street, but little by little she discovers fragments of herself wanting to become a better person. Writing poems and speaking her mind is what sets her free. Poetry is Esperanza's home in the heart:

I want to be
like the waves on the sea me.like the clouds in the wind, but I'm
One day I'll jump out of my skin (60)

In the chapter “Born Bad”, Esperanza recited a poem that she wrote to her sick aunt, Guadalupe. She metaphorically spoke about in her words that one day she'll grow up and take control over her life to change for the better. The poem is rich with metaphorical imagery, such as being “the waves on the sea,” “jumping out of her own skin,” and “shaking the sky like a hundred violins.” These images convey a sense of fluidity, freedom, and the transformative power of poetry. The act of reciting the poem not only comforts Aunt Guadalupe but also brings Esperanza a sense of hope and serenity. Through her words, Esperanza envisions a future where she can take control of her life and effect positive change. This moment underscores the therapeutic and aspirational qualities of poetry.

Furthermore, it was in “Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes”, Esperanza came to the realization that she does belong to the Mango Street and was not put there by mistake, at least for now. She imagines a life outside of Mango Street and explores the constraints society imposed. She is able to express herself, her desires and her uniqueness through her writing. It becomes a powerful tool for self-expression and a way to assert her voice in a world that often tries to silence her.

Poetry not only applies to Esperanza but the women living on Mango Street as well. Ruthie one of the characters who has poetic talent similar to Esperanza observes the world and describes it in a different perspective. Both Esperanza and Ruthie face the challenge of finding their true identities. Despite these challenges, poetry plays a crucial role in their journey towards self-discovery. It provides a means for them to reflect on their experiences, dreams, and aspirations, ultimately helping them to shape their identities. Ruthie's poetic sense and childlike wonder set her apart from the other characters in the novel. Ruthie lives in a world of her own, finding joy and beauty in the simplest things. Ruthie express herself with her poetic lines like, “The moon is beautiful like a balloon.”(68) showcasing her ability to see beauty and wonder in everyday objects and

phenomena.

Ruthie uses her imagination to escape from the harsh realities of her life. She creates a fantastical image that offers her a sense of joy and escape from her surroundings. She appears to have missed opportunities in life, leading her to seek solace in her poetic imagination. She appreciates the beauty of everyday life, which is something that resonates deeply with Esperanza, who is also a dreamer and aspiring writer.

Minerva's poetry reflects her dreams and desires for a better life. Her situation reminds Esperanza that she must work hard to achieve her goals and not let herself be confined by her environment. Minerva's poetic sense and struggles are explicitly highlighted in the chapter titled "Minerva Writes Poems" in *The House on Mango Street*. Minerva's plight, Esperanza realizes the importance of self-empowerment and independence. Minerva's struggle to break free from her abusive husband and her reliance on poetry for solace underscore the necessity of taking control of one's destiny. Esperanza is inspired to use her writing as a means of empowering herself and creating a better future. Minerva's poetry shows Esperanza how powerful and therapeutic writing can be. Despite her difficult circumstances, Minerva continues to write, using her poems to articulate her emotions and experiences.

Minerva's ability to create poetry in the midst of her struggles teaches Esperanza about resilience and inner strength. Even when faced with abuse and despair, Minerva does not give up her poetry, showing Esperanza that creativity and self-expression can provide strength and hope in difficult times. It reveals the harsh realities of her life, including her struggles with an abusive relationship and the burdens of motherhood. Minerva's art has been recognized for its powerful commentary on domestic oppression. It serves as a catalyst for conversations about gender roles, feminism, and societal expectations.

Sandra Cisneros and her character, Esperanza, embrace the English language as a means to thrive as writers and assert their independence as women. Embracing both English and Spanish language allows Cisneros to navigate multiple cultural languages. This linguistic flexibility enables her to connect with broader audience and articulate her experiences more fully. Stepping away from a purely Spanish-speaking environment might provide her with the freedom to experience and innovate with her use of language.

A psychoanalytical-linguistic approach to the novel reveals various reasons why the narrator distances herself from her native Spanish-speaking community. Like Esperanza

Cisneros may attempt to define her own distinct identity by resolving the conflict between her cultural background and her own goals by taking a step back might discover her individualism and make her voice heard. Cisneros frequently criticises her community and traditional gender norms. She draws attention to the limitations placed on women and their restricted opportunities in her writings. She might oppose these limits and promote greater gender equality and individual freedom by separating herself.

To conclude *The House on Mango Street* displays the circumstances that led Esperanza, Ruthie and Minerva to become independent through their love of writing and proved that the voice of writing can make a different effect on the reader if the writer uses the right voice for their passage. Writing keeps the characters spiritually free, because putting their experiences into words gives power over them. If they use beautiful language to write about a terrible experience, then the experience seems less awful. Their spiritual freedom eventually gives them power to be literally free as well. Thus it is proved that the power of writing is excessively useful and can give voices to those who cannot find theirs. By creating this book, Cisneros was able to touch many people's hearts and thoughts. The power of writing is countless and influences everyone.

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