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Humanities - ½

**Three Woman Can Change A Life**

J.R.R. Tolkien wrote, “Not all who wander are lost”. Esperanza is a great example of wandering without being lost, she wanders to find her way out, not to get lost and taken away. Esperanza, the main character of this novella, is influenced in many ways that she does not understand. In the novella The House on Mango Street, by Sandra Cisneros, Esperanza learns that she does not want to be tied down by marriage; she wants to be free and successful. She follows the women in her neighborhood, learning from their mistakes. The women who influence Esperanza face the many troubles that plague Hispanic women. Despite their mistakes Marin, Sally, and Alicia help lead Esperanza down the path to success.

Marin influences Esperanza during her childhood. One of the ways Marin influences her, “She is the one who told us how Davey the Baby’s sister got pregnant and what cream is best for taking off moustache hair and if you count the white flecks on your nails you can know how many boys are thinking of you and lots of other things I don’t remember now” (Cisneros 27). This quote shows that Marin teaches Esperanza, that she is not just a friend. Esperanza does not realize how much she learns from Marin until she is much older. Marin teaches Esperanza many things a girl learns while growing up. However this is not the only time Marin influences her. Marin teaches Esperanza the ways of that would in a way that she would not have learned on her own. “What matters, Marin says, is for the boys to see us and for us to see them, and since Marin’s skirts are shorter and since her eyes are pretty, and since Marin is already older than us in many ways, the boys who do pass say stupid things like I am in love with those two green apples you call eyes, give them to me why don’t you. And Marin just looks at them without even blinking and is not afraid” (Cisneros 27). This passage shows how Marin is teaching

Esperanza lessons, like not being afraid of men. Esperanza shows that she has learned from this lesson later in the book during an encounter with Sire, a young man from her barrio. The lessons Marin teach Esperanza help guide her later in life when she is faced with big decisions. Marin teaches Esperanza many lessons during her childhood.

Sally becomes her friend, but teaches Esperanza a few facts about life that are not exactly correct. For example she tells Esperanza sex is a wonderful experience, but when it happens it is not as Esperanza expects. “Sally, you lied. It wasn’t what you said at all. What he did. Where he touched me. I didn’t want it, Sally. The way they said it, the way it’s supposed to be, all the storybooks and movies, why did you lie to me” (Cisneros 99). This quote shows Esperanza’s frustration with Sally, because since she believed and trusted her, she was raped. Esperanza is upset that Sally mislead her, but she also does not know that there are other ways. Sally also teaches Esperanza about marriage. “Sally got married like we knew she would, young and not ready but married just the same. She met a marshmallow salesman at a school bazaar, and she married him in another state where it’s legal to get married before eighth grade. She has her husband and her house now” (Cisneros 101). Sally gets married very young, and she says that she is happy, but Esperanza believes she only marries to escape Mango Street. Esperanza is even more put off to getting married when she learns that Sally is also afraid of her husband, “She sits at home because she is afraid to go outside without his permission” (Cisneros 102).This showed Esperanza that she would have no freedom if she were to get married. When Sally does nothing to stand up for herself it makes Esperanza feel even more helpless. Sally teaches Esperanza a few life lessons that are not exactly correct, but help Esperanza learn to rely on herself for better life.

Alicia influences Esperanza is different ways than the other women in her life and as a result, she listens. Alicia gives Esperanza advice, “But today she is listening to my sadness because I don’t have a house. You live right here, 4006 Mango Street, Alicia says and points to the house I am ashamed of. No, this isn’t my house, I say and shake my head as if shaking could undo the year I’ve lived here” (Cisneros 66). Alicia is silent and listens to Esperanza complain about not having a house. Even though she does not realize it yet, Mango Street is more of a home than she will ever know. Alicia also encourages Esperanza to come back home after she leaves Mango Street by telling her that she, herself, will have to go back to where she has to come from if she truly wants change to happen. Esperanza really likes Alicia because she feels like Alicia understands her and will listen. “I like Alicia because once she gave me a little leather purse with GUADALAJARA stitched on it, which is home for Alicia, and one day she will go back” (Cisneros 106). Many times Esperanza is told by Alicia to come back to Mango Street once she escapes. Alicia is the friend that is always pushing you to pay attention to your past and your future to help you proceed through life. Alicia influences Esperanza by always listening.

Although they make many mistakes Marin, Sally and Alicia help Esperanza through her life on Mango Street. If Esperanza had never met Marin, Sally and Alicia she would have never realized that she must come back to Mango Street. She would have never known that she did not need a man to rely on. These women teach Esperanza that and she would have never known it without them. Everyone can learn, from this novella, that they only need themselves to escape their own Mango Street. Even now, many young women think marriage is their only means of escape. Reading this novella and witnessing Esperanza’s success can be a source of inspiration to young women in similar situations.

**Work Cited**

Cisneros, Sandra. The House on Mango Street. New York: Vintage Books, 1984.