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Humanities- 1/2

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**Building Blocks**

Mahatma Ghandi once said, “We must be the change we wish to see in the world.” This quote is important to many people including Espereanza because it shows how she has changed herself in order to change Mango Street. *The House on Mango Street*, by Sandra Cisneros, is a book about a young girl named Esperanza, who goes through life’s challenging situations, while living in a low budget home and witnessing the pain of the women in her neighborhood, Mango Street. Despite encountering many challenges in her life with controlling and abusive men, Esperanza uses the set backs she witnesses from the experience of Sally, Marin and Alicia to build a better future for herself.

Sally influences Esperanza. Specifically, Cisneros describes Sally’s influence as, “Sally is a girl with eyes like Egypt and nylons the color of smoke. The boys at school think she’s beautiful because her hair is shiny like raven feathers and when she laughs, she flicks her hair back like a satin shawl over her shoulders and laughs” (Cisneros 81). Sally, in this passage, is seen by Esperanza as an icon of beauty, and uses this to attract men so that she will be taken away to a nice house. However, through Sally, Esperanza learns that beauty is not the most important aspect in life. Esperanza uses this knowledge to seek an alternative method of getting herself out of Mango Street. Nevertheless, there are more examples of Sally’s influence on Esperanza. For example, “Until one day Sally’s father catches her talking to a boy and the next day she doesn’t come back to school” (Cisneros 93). As a result of Sally’s bruises, Esperanza finds out that Sally is controlled by her father through physical abuse. She then realizes that physical and mental abuse by controlling people can cause long term illness, and affects the people around her, which resulted in the abuse of Sally’s father. In the future, Esperanza uses Sally’s life as a reminder to herself that most men cannot be trusted, and that she will not be controlled by men or women when she grows up. Esperanza is influenced by Sally.

Marin influences Esperanza by teaching her about beauty and looks. In fact, Marin teaches her, “What matters, Marin says, is for the boys to see us and for us to see them” (Cisneros 27). Marin, in this passage, is teaching Esperanza not to attract young men by standing out. She convinces Esperanza that beauty is what takes her out of Mango Street and that a loving boy will equally make her happy. But Esperanza learns that from Marin’s failure beauty is not the method of escape. In addition, Cisneros describes exactly how Marin plans to get out of Mango Street. Specifically Esperanza states, “Marin says if she stays here next year she’s going to get a job downtown because that’s where the best jobs are since you always get to look beautiful and get to wear nice clothes and can meet someone in the subway who might marry you and take you to love in a big house far away” (Cisneros 26). Therefore, Marin explains to Esperanza that being attractive and wearing nice clothes will attract a man who will take her away from Mango Street. But Marin’s influence is short lived because Esperanza is insecure about her looks, and so she believes that she must find a different method of escaping Mango Street. Unlike Marin, Esperanza is aware that she should not wait for a man to save her. She understands that she must save herself. This explains how Esperanza is influenced by Marin.

Alicia influences Esperanza by revealing her experience with her father and how she regains the confidence necessary to plan her departure from Mango Street. For example when Esperanza talks about Alicia she says, “Two trains and a bus, because she doesn’t want to spend her whole life in a factory or behind a rolling. Is a good girl, my friend. Studies all night and sees the mice, the ones her father says do not exist” (Cisneros 31-32). Alicia, in this passage, is being sexually abused by her father. Esperanza realizes how Alicia is afraid from her father, yet she gains confidence from her because she sees that Alicia will not allow herself be abused and controlled by men forever as she is studying for her college degree. Likewise, Esperanza follows Alicia’s path to being someone who is successful because of her own effort. In particular Esperanza says, “Alicia whose mama died, is sorry there is no one older to rise and make the lunchbox tortillas. Alicia, who inherited her mama’s rolling pin and sleepingness, is young and smart and studies for the first time at the university” (Cisneros 31). In this passage, Alicia shows that in spite that she takes the role of her mother, she strives to have a better future for herself by going to college. As a result, Esperanza has a successful life of becoming a writer. Esperanza is influenced by Alicia’s determination to become successful in spite of the experience with her father. Alicia’s perseverance helps Esperanza to find her own confidence.

While encountering many challenges in her life, Sally, Marin and Alicia influence Esperanza to have a better future. If she had not been able to meet Sally, Marin and Alicia, Esperanza would not have seen how abusive and controlling men can be. The three women teach Esperanza that she can only be free if she stays away from the restriction associated with men. All young women and men would benefit from learning from Esperanza’s experiences with the three women in this reading. Even today, many young women still depend on a man and think that marriage is the only way to escape from an unfulfilling life. Many young men also continue to treat women unequally. In conclusion the flaw of society is that women are mistreated, but are not accounted for their full potential.

**Work Cited**

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