

May 15, 2025

Dear Rising 9th Graders,

In the fall, each of you will be arriving from one world (or, really, from multiple worlds) and entering another: high school. This is literally marked by a move from the Middle School to the Upper School campus, but it is also marked by subtler, more internal shifts and changes. With that in mind, this year's 9th grade English class theme is: **Between Worlds**. Throughout the year, we'll be reading compelling fiction, poetry, drama, and nonfiction about people navigating boundaries in culture, identity, history, space, and time.

In the nature of our reading and writing, too, we will be traveling between worlds: from YA fiction to so-called "literary fiction," from poetry to drama, from creative writing to analytical essays. Throughout this journey, we will be reflecting on a variety of questions relating to the world out there and the one inside of us, how we define and designate our various worlds, and what effects the collision and interplay between different worlds have on us and on others.

For now, as you read the summer book, Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*, I want you to be thinking about how many ways we define and understand the kinds of worlds we inhabit – our identities, cultures, landscapes, institutions, biologies, living arrangements, neighborhoods, etc. Here are some specific questions to get you started as you read:

- How does *Mango Street* represent the 9th grade theme "Between Worlds"?
- What does home and/or place mean to characters in this novel? What does it mean to you?
- What does the novel have to say about the notion of "fitting in"? Can you relate? Why?
- How does the novel represent gender roles and expectations?
- What are your impressions of the novel's style (it is made up of 44 short character sketches, or stories, called vignettes)? What effect do you think this unconventional structure has on readers? Why does Cisneros tell Esperanza's story in this manner?
- What symbols, metaphors, and other interesting language do you notice?

As you consider these questions, stay actively engaged with the text by **annotating extensively**:

- underlining and defining compelling or confusing language
- writing in the margins
- listing any questions and themes that you notice as you read
- summarizing each vignette at the end of the section
- answering any and all of the above questions

Less than two years ago, I myself recently moved between worlds: from Los Angeles, where I was born and raised, to Santa Fe, a city where I knew almost no one but for which I have a deep and abiding love; from Marlborough School, an all-girls school, to Santa Fe Prep; from teaching mostly 11th and 12th graders to teaching mostly 9th graders; from having only one child (Atticus, 7) to having two (Margot, our daughter, will be 2½ when I meet you in August); from being a life-long renter to being a homeowner. I could go on. Needless to say, I'll be right alongside you as we navigate our respective upheavals and transitions between worlds, and I am so grateful to have such wonderful company on this adventure! Until we meet in August.

With gratitude,

Adam Lowenstein (call me Dr. Lo)