

The House on Mango Street – In Class Essay (200 points)

You are to choose one of the following topics and write an essay (2-3 pages) on it. Whichever essay you choose to do, I very strongly recommend that you take a few minutes – come up with a thesis and write a short tentative outline. When time is limited, as it is during an in-class essay, an outline will help you save time and connect one thought to the next in a logical way.

1. How does Esperanza's vision of owning a house and achieving happiness through that act change throughout the novel? Where does she begin? Where do her ideas end? What are the pivotal events in her history that effect her point of view? Be sure to discuss both the obvious and subtle reasons for her developing viewpoint. Don't only repeat what's been said in class or in group works – above all be specific and give plenty of support in your answer (all paragraphs should have at least 1 quote from the novel).

2. What are the expectations of women as portrayed in *The House on Mango Street*, and how does that effect those women's lives? Be sure to start out with a provable, unified thesis that answers this question. You should consider men's expectations, society's expectations, her culture's expectations, and how all of these (and more) effect the women in the book's own expectations of themselves.

3. Virginia Woolf wrote that women have not written more because they have not been given that chance. Unlike men, they lack "a room of [their] own." A place. A place to write, a place in the canon of literature, a place to be taken seriously. Consider the following excerpt from her essay ("A Room of One's Own")

I told you in the course of this paper that Shakespeare had a sister; but do not look for her in Sir Sidney Lee's life of the poet. She died young—alas, she never wrote a word. She lies buried where the omnibuses now stop, opposite the Elephant and Castle. Now my belief is that this poet who never wrote a word and was buried at the cross-roads still lives. She lives in you and in me, and in many other women who are not here to-night, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed. But she lives; for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh... the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down.

Drawing her life from the lives of the unknown who were her forerunners, as her brother did before her, she will be born. As for her coming without that preparation, without that effort on our part, without that determination that when she is born again she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry, that we cannot expect, for that would be impossible. But I maintain that she would come if we worked for her, and that so to work, even in poverty and obscurity, is worth while.

Write an essay connecting this, in the most specific way, with Esperanza, Cisneros, and *The House on Mango Street*.

4. Using the male characters that are in the book – dispute the idea that Cisneros' novel is "anti-male." While you can consider the negative portrayals of male characters in the novel – you may also want to look at other not-so-negative characters (I'll give you one: her father). Be specific and use quotes throughout your paper – make sure you have a strong thesis before you begin.