Text Connection 3

The House on Mango Street
by Sandra Cisneros

You remember periods in your own childhood, periods that affected you in different ways. As you read these segments from Sandra Cisneros’ The House on Mango Street, think about the storyteller’s childhood experiences, and see if you can relate to any of them. Have you ever had to move? What’s it like to move into a new neighborhood? How does moving into a new neighborhood translate to moving into a new passage of your life?

Use the Clues A: Vocabulary Strategies

• Read lines 1–8.
• Reread the underlined word, move.
• Check the box that best defines the underlined word. What does the word move mean in this context?
  ❏ dance
  ❏ relocate
  ❏ make progress
• What clues did you use to choose this answer?

(continued)

The House on Mango Street

We didn’t always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that I can’t remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot. Each time it seemed there’d be one more of us. By the time we got to Mango Street we were six—Mama, Papa, Carlos, Kiki, my sister Nenny and me.
The house on Mango Street is ours, and we don’t have to pay rent to anybody, or share the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not to make too much noise, and there isn’t a landlord banging on the ceiling with a broom. But even so, it’s not the house we’d thought we’d get.

We had to leave the flat on Loomis quick. The water pipes broke and the landlord wouldn’t fix them because the house was too old. We had to leave fast. We were using the washroom next door and carrying water over in empty milk gallons. That’s why Mama and Papa looked for a house, and that’s why we moved into the house on Mango Street, far away, on the other side of town.

They always told us that one day we would move into a house, a real house that would be ours for always so we wouldn’t have to move each year. And our house would have running water and pipes that worked. And inside it would have real stairs, not hallway stairs, but stairs inside like the houses on TV. And we’d have a basement and at least three washrooms so when we took a bath we wouldn’t have to tell everybody. Our house would be white with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence. This was
the house Papa talked about when he held a lottery ticket and this was the house Mama dreamed up in the stories she told us before we went to bed.

But the house on Mango Street is not the way they told it at all. It’s small and red with tight steps in front and windows so small you’d think they were holding their breath. Bricks are crumbling in places, and the front door is so swollen you have to push hard to get in. There is no front yard, only four little elms the city planted by the curb. Out back is a small garage for the car we don’t own yet and a small yard that looks smaller between the two buildings on either side. There are stairs in our house, but they’re ordinary hallway stairs, and the house has only one washroom. Everybody has to share a bedroom—Mama and Papa, Carlos and Kiki, me and Nenny.

Once when we were living on Loomis, a nun from my school passed by and saw me playing out front. The laundromat downstairs had been boarded up because it had been robbed two days before and the owner had painted on the wood YES WE’RE OPEN so as not to lose business.

Use the Clues C: Vocabulary Strategies

• Read lines 51–55.
• Reread the underlined word, lose.
• Check the box that best defines the underlined word. What does the word lose mean in this context?
  ❑ decrease
  ❑ move
  ❑ misplace
• What clues did you use to choose this answer?

Where do you live? she asked.
There, I said pointing up to the third floor.
You live there?
There. I had to look to where she pointed—the third floor, the paint peeling, wooden bars Papa had nailed on the windows so we wouldn't fall out. You live there? The way she said it made me feel like nothing. There. I lived there. I nodded.

I knew then I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn't it. The house on Mango Street isn't it. For the time being, Mama says. Temporary, says Papa. But I know how those things go.

Boys & Girls

The boys and the girls live in separate worlds. The boys in their universe and we in ours. My brothers for example. They’ve got plenty to say to me and Nenny inside the house. But outside they can’t be seen talking to girls. Carlos and Kiki are each other’s best friend . . . not ours.

Nenny is too young to be my friend. She’s just my sister and that was not my fault. You don’t pick your sisters, you just get them and sometimes they come like Nenny.

She can’t play with those Vargas kids or she’ll turn out just like them. And since she comes right after me, she is my responsibility.

Someday I will have a best friend all my own. One I can tell my secrets to. One who will understand my jokes without my having to explain them. Until then I am a red balloon, a balloon tied to an anchor.

1 temporary: for a limited time; short-term
Laughter

Nenny and I don’t look like sisters . . . not right away. Not the way you can tell with Rachel and Lucy who have the same fat popsicle lips like everybody else in their family. But me and Nenny, we are more alike than you would know. Our laughter for example. Not the shy ice cream bells’ giggle of Rachel and Lucy’s family, but all of a sudden and surprised like a pile of dishes breaking. And other things I can’t explain.

One day we were passing a house that looked, in my mind, like houses I had seen in Mexico. I don’t know why. There was nothing about the house that looked exactly like the houses I remembered. I’m not even sure why I thought it, but it seemed to feel right.

Look at that house, I said, it looks like Mexico.

Rachel and Lucy look at me like I’m crazy, but before they can let out a laugh, Nenny says: Yes, that’s Mexico all right. That’s what I was thinking exactly.

Meme Ortiz

Meme Ortiz moved into Cathy’s house after her family moved away. His name isn’t really Meme. His name is Juan. But when we asked him what his name was he said Meme, and that’s what everybody calls him except his mother.

Meme has a dog with gray eyes, a sheepdog with two names, one in English and one in Spanish. The dog is big, like a man dressed in a dog suit, and runs the same way its owner does, clumsy and wild with the limbs flopping all over the place like untied shoes.
Cathy’s father built the house Meme moved into. It is wooden. Inside the floors slant. Some rooms uphill. Some down. And there are no closets. Out front there are twenty-one steps, all lopsided and jutting like crooked teeth (made that way on purpose, Cathy said, so the rain will slide off), and when Meme’s mama calls from the doorway, Meme goes scrambling up the twenty-one wooden stairs with the dog with two names scrambling after him.

Around the back is a yard, mostly dirt, and a greasy bunch of boards that used to be a garage. But what you remember most is this tree, huge, with fat arms and mighty families of squirrels in the higher branches. All around, the neighborhood of roofs, black-tarred and A-framed, and in their gutters, the balls that never came back down to earth. Down at the base of the tree, the dog with two names barks into the empty air, and there at the end of the block, looking smaller still, our house with its feet tucked under like a cat.

This is the tree we chose for the First Annual Tarzan Jumping Contest. Meme won. And broke both arms.

**Bums in the Attic**

I want a house on a hill like the ones with the gardens where Papa works. We go on Sundays, Papa’s day off. I used to go. I don’t anymore. You don’t like to go out with us, Papa says. Getting too old? Getting too stuck-up, says Nenny.

I don’t tell them I am ashamed—all of us staring out the window like the hungry. I am tired of looking at what we can’t have. When we win the lottery . . . Mama begins, and then I stop listening.

People who live on hills sleep so close to the stars they forget those of us who live too much on earth. They don’t look down at all except to be content to live on hills. They have nothing to do with last week’s garbage or fear of rats. Night comes. Nothing wakes them but the wind.
One day I’ll own my own house, but I won’t forget who I am or where I came from. Passing bums will ask, Can I come in? I’ll offer them the attic, ask them to stay, because I know how it is to be without a house.

Some days after dinner, guests and I will sit in front of a fire. Floorboards will squeak upstairs. The attic grumble. Rats? they’ll ask.

Bums, I’ll say, and I’ll be happy.

Identify It: Participles and Participial Phrases.

Read each numbered sentence. Look at the underlined phrase in it.

Check the correct column to indicate whether the participle in the phrase is acting alone as an adjective (A), or is part of a participial phrase (PP).

Write the noun or pronoun that is being described on the line.

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A Smart Cookie

I could’ve been somebody, you know? my mother says and sighs. She has lived in this city her whole life. She can speak two languages. She can sing an opera. She knows how to fix a TV. But she doesn’t know which subway train to take to get downtown. I hold her hand very tight while we wait for the right train to arrive.

She used to draw when she had time. Now she draws with a needle and thread, little knotted rosebuds, tulips made of silk thread. Someday she would like to go to the ballet. Someday she would like to see a play. She borrows opera

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4 attic: a room or space under the roof of a house

(continued)
records from the public library and sings with velvety lungs powerful as morning glories.

Today while cooking oatmeal she is Madame Butterfly until she sighs and points the wooden spoon at me. I could’ve been somebody, you know? Esperanza, you go to school.

Study hard. That Madame Butterfly was a fool. She stirs the oatmeal. Look at my comadres. She means Izaura whose husband left and Yolanda whose husband is dead. Got to take care all your own, she says shaking her head.

Then out of nowhere:

Shame is a bad thing, you know. It keeps you down. You want to know why I quit school? Because I didn’t have nice clothes. No clothes, but I had brains.

Yup, she says disgusted, stirring again. I was a smart cookie then.

**Alicia & I Talking on Edna’s Steps**

I like Alicia because once she gave me a little leather purse with the word GUADALAJARA stitched on it, which is home for Alicia, and one day she will go back there. But today she is listening to my sadness because I don’t have a house.

You live right here, 4006 Mango, 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. I don’t belong. I don’t ever want to come from here. You have a home, Alicia, and one day you’ll go there, to a town you remember, but me I never had a house, not even a photograph . . . only one I dream of.

No, Alicia says. Like it or not you are Mango Street, and one day you’ll come back too.

Not me. Not until somebody makes it better.

Who’s going to do it? The mayor?

And the thought of the mayor coming to Mango Street makes me laugh out loud.

Who’s going to do it? Not the mayor.
A House of My Own


Only a house quiet as snow, a space for myself to go, clean as paper before the poem.

Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes

I like to tell stories. I tell them inside my head. I tell them after the mailman says, Here’s your mail. Here’s your mail he said.

I make a story for my life, for each step my brown shoe takes. I say, “And so she trudged up the wooden stairs, her sad brown shoes taking her to the house she never liked.”

I like to tell stories. I am going to tell you a story about a girl who didn’t want to belong.

We didn’t always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, but what I remember most is Mango Street, sad red house, the house I belong but do not belong to.

I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free.

One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away.

Friends and neighbors will say, What happened to that Esperanza? Where did she go with all those books and paper? Why did she march so far away?

They will not know I have gone away to come back. For the ones I left behind. For the ones who cannot out.

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5 porch: a covered structure outside the entrance to a house

6 ache: to feel dull, constant pain