Questions for Sandra Cisneros’ *The House on Mango Street*

1. *The House on Mango Street* appears to wander casually from subject to subject – from hair to hips, from clouds to feet, from an invalid aunt to a girl named Sally, who has “eyes like Egypt” and whose father sometimes beats her. What does this apparent randomness disguise?
   - An artful exploration of themes of individual identity and communal loyalty, estrangement and loss, escape and return, the lure of romance and the dead end of sexual inequality and oppression.

2. Esperanza is very uncomfortable with eating in public – see “The First Job” and “A Rice Sandwich”- what does this tell us about her as a character?

3. Is this a feminist text? How so?

4. In “Beautiful and Cruel” (p. 88-89) Esperanza says, “I have begun my own quiet war.” What does she mean?

5. In "Boys and Girls" [8-9], Cisneros writes, "The boys and the girls live in separate worlds." In "Beautiful & Cruel," there is the declaration "I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain." [88] How would you describe the respective worlds in which Cisneros's boys and girls live? What kind of men and women are they likely to become when they grow up? How would you sum up the book's depiction of relations between the sexes?

6. Esperanza describes a number of women as possible role models: Marin [26-7], Alicia [31-2], Sire's girlfriend Lois [72-3], Sally [81-3, 92-8]. What does she admire about these women? What things can they teach her?

7. How is this a book about culture?
   - Although Cisneros uses language as a recurring metaphor for the gulf between Mexican-Americans and the majority culture, what keeps Esperanza Cordero and her family and friends locked in their barrio is something more obdurate than language: a confluence of racism, poverty, and shame.
   - Reminder…that many Chicanos did not come to the US by choice, but simply found themselves in alien territory as a result of the US’s expansionist policy into country that had once been Mexican.
• Reminder…talk about the difference between Chicanos and Mexican American, etc.

8. In the stories "My Name" and "No Speak English," Cisneros describes a gulf between two languages, a gap of meaning and of feeling. In English, for example, Esperanza means hope; in Spanish, says the narrator, it suggests sadness and waiting [10]. How does Esperanza feel about her two languages—and by extension, about her two cultures? How does she feel about the society outside her barrio?
   • Look particularly at the chapters "Cathy Queen of Cats," "Those Who Don't," "Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark," "Geraldo No Last Name," and "Bums In the Attic."

9. Cisneros has said that her “first love,” is a fascination with speech and voices. How is that interest exemplified in House on Mango Street? Do the characters that Esperanza introduces us to have any common bond? If so, what are they? If no, why not?
   • Writing in the voice of Esperanza, Cisneros created a series of interlocking stoires, alternately classified as a novel and as a collection of prose poems because of the vivid and poignant nature of the language.

10. Throughout The House on Mango Street, Cisneros's narrator describes herself from two points of view: as she sees herself and as she believes others see her. We can find an example of this in "My Name": "At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth."[11] Where else in the book does Cisneros convey this dual consciousness? How does Esperanza see herself? How does she think other people perceive her?

11. Nearly all the characters in Cisneros's book dream of escaping. What do they want to leave? Describe the ways in which different people try to escape, as well as the result of their efforts. Do you think that Esperanza's dreams of escaping are likely to be more successful? How does being poor—as most of these characters are—affect one's chances of escaping a dead-end neighborhood or fulfilling other dreams?

12. What kind of a house does Esperanza dream of? What does she say about her neighborhood on Mango Street? How does her ideal of a house and her actual house on Mango Street reflect her aspirations of success and her ultimate goals?
   • P. 110- “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? Wherer 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.”
   • The three sisters tell her she must come back for the others. A full circle. (p. 105)