**Group Context Page**

Ms. Bachelor, Mr. Knous, Ms. Stayner, Ms. Vroome

English

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Context: *The House on Mango Street*

(Ms. Bachelor) “Sandra Cisneros was born in 1954 in Chicago to a Spanish-speaking Mexican father and an English-speaking mother of Mexican descent. She was the third child and only daughter in a family of seven children. While she spent most of her childhood in one of Chicago’s Puerto Rican neighborhoods, she also traveled back and forth to Mexico with her family. Cisneros has published two books of poetry, *My Wicked Wicked Ways* and *Loose Woman*; a children’s book titled *Hair*/*Pelitos*; a collection of stories titled *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*; and, most recently, a second novel, *Caramelo*.” (Sparknotes, *The House on Mango Street*)

(Mr. Knous) “Cisneros is part of a group of Chicana and Latina writers who became prominent in the 1980s and 1990s, among them Gloria Anzaldua, Laura Esquivel, and Julia Alvarez. *Chicana* refers to a woman of Mexican descent who lives in the United States. *Latina* is a more encompassing word, referring to women from all the Latin American countries. These women were part of a larger group of American minority women, such as Amy Tan and Toni Morrison, who found success as writers at the end of the twentieth century. While many of them had been writing for some time, renewed interest in the issues of race and gender in the 1980s provided a milieu in which their work became a vital part of the dialogue taking place.” (Sparknotes, *The House on Mango Street*)

(Ms. Vroome) *“The House on Mango Street* received mostly positive reviews when it was published in 1984, and it has sold more than two million copies worldwide. However, some male Mexican-American critics have attacked the novel, arguing that by writing about a character whose goal is to leave the barrio (a neighborhood or community where most of the residents are of Spanish-speaking origin), Cisneros has betrayed the barrio, which they see as an important part of Mexican tradition. Others have criticized the novel as encouraging assimilation, labeling Cisneros a *vendida*, or sellout. Such critics have condemned Cisneros for perpetuating what they see as negative stereotypes of Mexican-American men (the wife-beaters, the overbearing husbands), while at the same time contending that the feminism Cisneros embraces was created by white women. Cisneros’s defenders claim that a Mexican-American woman’s experiences are very different from the experiences of a Mexican-American man, and that it’s therefore unfair to expect Cisneros, a woman, to present a unified front with male Mexican-American writers. In *The House on Mango Street*, Cisneros focuses on the problems of being a woman in a largely patriarchal Hispanic society.” (Sparknotes, *The House on Mango Street*)

(Ms. Vroome) *“The House on Mango Street* consists of what Cisneros calls “lazy poems,” vignettes that are not quite poems and not quite full stories. The vignettes are sometimes only two or three paragraphs long, and they often contain internal rhymes, as a poem might. This form also reflects a young girl’s short attention span, flitting from one topic to another, never placing too much importance on any one event. Within these very short pieces, Cisneros introduces dozens of characters, some only once or twice, and in this way, the structure of the novel imitates the geography of the barrio. No one person has very much space, either in the barrio or on the page, and the neighborhood is small enough that even a young girl can know everyone in it by name. The conflicts and problems in these little stories are never fully resolved, just as the fates of men, women, and children in the barrio are often uncertain. Finally, the novel’s structure suggests the variable fate of Chicana women, whose life stories often depend on men. Without a dominant, omniscient, masculine voice to tell the women’s stories, their narratives are left waiting and unresolved.” (Sparknotes, *The House on Mango Street*)