

Argumentative Sample Response

The House on Mango Street, by Sandra Cisneros, is a novella about Esperanza, a Latina girl living in Chicago who is trying to find her place in the world. Cisneros uses figurative language and symbols throughout the book to help the reader understand Esperanza's emotions, identity, and community in a deeper way. One symbol that appears frequently in the novella is names that are related to personal and social identity. Cisneros explains how characters feel about their names and how others use them to highlight internal conflicts and characterize the community on Mango Street. In *The House on Mango Street*, names symbolize the exploration of one's identity and how individuals can be shaped by others, revealing the characters' internal conflicts.

In the vignette "My Name," Esperanza's name symbolizes her conflicted feelings about her identity. This vignette opens with Esperanza describing her conflicted feelings about her name being pronounced in two languages when she says, "In English, my name means hope. In Spanish, it means too many letters" (10). While "hope" sounds **affirmed** and positive, the Spanish pronunciation of her name feels heavy and awkward to her, reflecting her uncertainty. Then, Esperanza explains that she was named after her great-grandmother, who had to get married against her wishes and spent most of her life in deep sadness, looking out a window. Esperanza is clear that, "I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window" (11). Although Esperanza is proud to be named after her great-grandmother, she wants more independence than her great-grandmother had. The name feels like a burden rather than a true expression of who she is. Because of this, Esperanza wants "to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me . . . Something like Zeze the X will do" (11) to empower herself with a name that is entirely her own rather than one burdened by the past.

In "Meme Ortiz" and in "Geraldo No Last Name," names symbolize how others have the power to shape and influence one's identity. Marin, Esperanza's neighbor, finds herself at the hospital after a man she just met is killed by a car. She brings him to the hospital and speaks to the doctors and police, but is disturbed when she realizes the only thing she knows about the man is his first name: "Geraldo. That's all" (65). Because no one knows his full name or story, he is dismissed under **rigid stereotypes** instead of being recognized as a complete human being. But by knowing his first name, Marin knows him better than people who see him as "just another *brazer* who didn't speak English. Just another wetback" (66). Marin knows that Geraldo was a human being, not just the slurs and stereotypes that some people use to refer to him. Meme's identity is also shaped and influenced by others. When Esperanza asks Meme what his name is, "he said Meme, and that's what everybody calls him except his mother" (21). Meme seems **content** to imitate the name others give him, even though it distances him from his given name.

As Cisneros has demonstrated throughout this text, names can represent many things. While some characters feel ashamed or limited by their names, Esperanza begins to imagine a future in which she can reshape what her name means. In one vignette, names symbolize the burdens of the past. In another, names symbolize what it means to know and respect the full humanity of another person. By the end of the novel, readers see that names define us; they can hold us back, or they can set us free.