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Leaving Mango Street and Stereotyped Gender Roles Behind

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The 21st century is a time of shifting gender roles and expectations, arguably greater than any we have seen since the agricultural revolution. When humans transitioned from hunter-gatherers to farmers and city-dwellers, the resultant role of warrior, typically a male prized for their physical strength, enabled the beginnings of patriarchy, gender stereotypes, unequal rights, and eventually misogyny. However, with our increasingly technological and digital society gender roles are becoming more fluid than they ever have been in Western recorded history. Our children are in the midst of this revolution, and, in order to derive the maximum benefit from this release of the shackles of gender expectations, it will help them to learn the history and effects of gender role stereotypes. Some of our students have learned about the historical oppression of women and even the first wave women's rights movements, such as the fight for suffrage, yet they may not realize it is something that exists today both overtly and covertly.

In this unit, centered around the core fiction text *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, 8th graders explore the history and implications of stereotyped gender roles, and about modern feminism. In the course of the unit, they respond to nonfiction text, analyze literature, reflect on their own parental expectations and write creatively. The students in my school are from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Material students may be able to contribute from their own ancestral families of origin will enrich the unit and help make it personally relevant. In addition to the expected focus on the stereotyping of women the unit can devote ample time to the stereotyping of boys and men, as well as feelings of entrapment as the result of parental expectations for many young people.

Differing Expectations and Perceptions

While it seems clear that current physiological research on humans, including brain imaging studies, finds few consistent differences between male and female brains, systemic societal expectations and socialization results in differing abilities and behavior from the cradle to the grave when studying groups separated by gender.¹ Societal and parental expectations are a major factor influencing schoolchildren and young teens, with their growing needs for individuation and independence. Adolescents are at the prime stage in their development to have issues regarding gender stereotypes brought into awareness and thus to be able to

break free of them. In addition, young girls who excel in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects may not be aware of discrimination they could encounter in the future, whereas if they have knowledge, they will be more equipped to fight against such issues. Another topic which can be explored here is the growing level of anxiety in girls which may be the result of gender expectations to please adults.² Finally, the dearth of women in leadership roles in politics, business, and virtually every field must be analyzed and understood if we are to grow healthy, confident, female leaders for the future. Female political leaders are held to different standards from males.³ According to Sarah Thebaud and Laura Doering, “When men direct others, they’re often assumed to be direct and competent. But when women direct others, they’re often disliked or labeled abrasive or authoritarian.”⁴ These types of attributions are likely affecting our current political situation. These researchers also point out, perhaps more importantly for our students, traditional gender stereotypes can bias employment outcomes in terms of who applies for and is hired for particular jobs, how much they are paid and who receives promotions and career advancement, thus directly impacting our young people’s futures.

Teaching the Concept of Stereotypes and History of Feminism

The unit on stereotypes will begin with basic definitions and the exploration of key terminology used such as stereotype, discrimination, gender, feminism, and equity. Students could briefly study the history of feminism by assigning small groups some key figures to research and present on such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, Alice Paul, Gloria Steinem, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, bell hooks, Malala Yousafzai, Audre Lorde, Alice Schwarzer, and Rigoberta Menchu.⁵ Then, in order to maximize student engagement with the topic, they could brainstorm a list of stereotypes and gender roles that would then be discussed with the class. Next, students will read nonfiction texts about gender stereotypes and examine data in an easily understandable infographic such as “Gender by the Numbers.”⁶ Care should be taken to make sure both genders are included in the text to keep the boys in the class invested in the topic.⁷ In addition, boys could examine the concept of feminist men and how feminism has impacted male gender roles. In order to help students see the broad implications of this issue, a science article such as “Stereotypes Might Make ‘Female’ Hurricanes Deadlier” could also be read and text responded to. Students will delve more deeply into this topic in a jigsaw group format with additional nonfiction texts such as “Math Isn’t Just for Boys,” an article which addresses how girls are impacted by other people’s beliefs; “How our Education System Undermines Gender Equity,” which discusses possibilities for change; and Emma Watson’s “HeForShe” speech to the United Nations.

The Topic of Sexuality

Though sexual identity becomes apparent in middle school, the topic is infrequently addressed in school, or only biophysical topics are mentioned. The focus is typically on puberty, disease, and decision making, to the exclusion of social constructs and norms. Thus, students are left to create their own knowledge from sources such as their friends, social media, and books which of course can be biased and misleading. As the topic of

sexuality is still taboo in our society, English teachers who are comfortable addressing other controversial topics such as racism in the contexts of their chosen literature may gloss over sexuality for fear of adversity if they broach it.⁸ However, this author believes it would be a mistake to leave unexamined the important messages about sexuality in *The House on Mango Street*, as we will see below.

The House on Mango Street

The core fiction text for this unit is *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. This section of study will begin by having students explore some biographical information about Sandra Cisneros, a truly inspirational figure in literature. Some sections from Cisneros' memoir, *A House of My Own*, can also be used before and/or after reading the novel. In her autobiographical stories, Cisneros describes the writing of her novel, as well as her own struggles to break loose of both gender and cultural stereotypes of Latina women. While teaching high school herself before writing the book she noted the dearth of literature that addressed her own needs, "Then it occurred to me that none of the books in this class, in any of my classes, in all the years of my education had ever discussed a house like mine. Not in books or magazines or film." (127) Little did she know that her novel would become a seminal work that paved the way for women of many cultures to write in the future.

Cultural Identity

It would be a mistake to plow into the gender stereotypes in *The House on Mango Street* without first addressing cultural identity, especially because these are inter-related in the text. Cisneros's protagonist Esperanza, like her author, is ethnically Mexican but culturally Mexican American, and struggles to establish her identity without any appropriate role models. "She is a young girl surrounded by examples of abused, defeated, worn out women, but the woman she wants to be must be free."⁹ The novel is, in fact, a fictionalized autobiography of this adolescent female who's desire to write in against the patriarchal Mexican American tradition. When describing her grandmother, Esperanza notes "Mexicans don't like their women strong,"¹⁰ however, Cisneros has also said that the stereotypes she writes about are not completely true and has described her Mexican female ancestors as fierce and brave. It seems important to remember and teach that stereotypes by nature are simplistic generalizations that never describe the complexity of a human individual. However, it is clear that the women of Mango Street are triply oppressed because of their sex, Chicana culture, and poverty.¹¹ And Jaqueline Doyle noted, in her analysis, "Most of the women yearn for different endings."¹² An additional related area of interest is the theory that third culture kids who grow up in a different culture than both their parents and the mainstream society where they live, end up with a certain resilience and unique contribution to make.

Gender Identity and Sexuality

As mentioned above, Esperanza's emerging sexuality is an important subtext of this novel. "Her biological transformation marks a crucial point in Esperanza's self-development, as it is them that she begins to note not only her own sexual difference but also its implications for her as a woman."¹³ In fact, a study of the various women in the story shows the danger of this sexuality in a Mexican patriarchal world. Cisneros rejects the fairy tale notions that beauty, or marriage can save you from the horrible fate of being shackled and suffocated in

this subculture. The women go from being imprisoned by fathers to by husbands, and even, in one case, a son. They are abandoned by the husbands, who were supposed to rescue them, left with children to care for in poverty. This is not the life that Esperanza will choose for herself.

According to Cisneros, Mexican culture has two types of female archetypes which have influenced literature, and which Leslie Petty has thoroughly analyzed.¹⁴ Every culture seems to have their manifestations of “good girl” and “bad girl” archetypes, but it is worthwhile to examine these Mexican versions as they appear both subtly and obviously in *The House on Mango Street*. More familiar is la Virgen de Guadalupe, the Mexican version of the Christian Holy Mother. She is the Christian transformation of Aztec pagan Goddess of Tonantzin, just as images of Mary around the world absorbed and encompassed indigenous goddesses. La Virgen de Guadalupe represents feminine purity, nurturing, and self-sacrifice. She also takes on a political significance as she is considered to be a protector of the native people and was used on banners during the Mexican revolution and is now considered queen of Hispanidad. On the other hand, we have La Malinche, the violated woman whom the Spanish refer to as Marina. La Malinche was an actual person who was “Cortes’s interpreter and mistress during the conquest of Mexico.”¹⁵ She was from an indigenous tribe, was sold or kidnapped and then enslaved by another tribe, where she learned the Mayan language. When given to Cortes, she became invaluable for her knowledge of languages. She betrayed her people by helping Cortes defeat Montezuma and the Mexican people have not forgiven her betrayal. Though she gave birth to Cortes’s son she was given by him in marriage to one of his officers. As the bad girl in this duality, la Malinche, though intelligent and invaluable to the patriarchy and conquerors, both betrayed her people and was betrayed by her parents and her lover.

Virtually every female character in *The House on Mango Street* has a close alliance with one of these two archetypes, which makes it impossible for Esperanza to find a suitable role model.¹⁶ The adult women who mirror la Virgen are her own mother and her aunt, both of whom encourage Esperanza to break free from the limitations of her culture and gender. Her mother is a protector to Esperanza, she is nurturing and self-sacrificing, but her own life was incomplete since she could not fulfill her academic potential due to cultural barriers. Her aunt Lupe, named for la Virgen de Guadalupe, is a passive, ill woman who lives in a filthy shrine but encourages Esperanza to write poetry and follow her dreams. The adolescent women who mirror la Malinche are for the most part violated and imprisoned by the men in their lives. Rosa Vargas is abandoned by a man and left with too many children to care for. Rafaela is locked away by her husband because her sexuality is threatening. Minerva is also abandoned by her husband with two children and is always sad. Marin, namesake of la Malinche, betrays her family and culture by aspiring to a more Western life, but her success too is tied to dependence on a man. As Petty notes, Marin “represents the darker, more sexual side of Chicana femininity.”¹⁷ Even Sally, who initially is kind to Esperanza but betrays her, embodies both images, and is stigmatized at school and locked away by her father. Like in a fairy tale, she perceives marriage as an escape. But Esperanza has seen for herself that this is not a true story. She rejects the passivity associated with both la Virgen and la Malinche. Esperanza sees that the houses of all these women, belonging to men, serve as places of imprisonment. Her plan to leave Mango Street to fulfill her potential as a writer and then return to help save the others fuses both these archetypes, and parallels Cisneros’s own struggles.

Analysis of Select Vignettes

“Hairs”

This short vignette is the second in the book. It is perfect for students to identify with, as Esperanza describes all the different types of hair in her family using vivid similes, “My Papa’s hair is like a broom, all up in the air.

And me, my hair is lazy. It never obeys barrettes or bands. Carlos' hair is thick and straight. He does not need to comb it. Nenny's hair is slippery - slides out of your hand. And Kiki, who is the youngest, has hair like fur."¹⁸ Significantly, her mother's hair has a whole paragraph to itself, signifying the importance of Esperanza's mother in her life, "like little rosettes, like little candy circles...is the warm smell of bread before you bake it, is the smell when she makes room for you on her side of the bed still warm with her skin, and you sleep near her..."¹⁹ With figurative language and vivid imagery, Cisneros has shown us the significance of Esperanza's mother's nurturing in her life.

"Boys & Girls"

In the next brief vignette, we are introduced to Esperanza's entire frame of reference for her views on gender identity. "The boys and the girls live in separate worlds."²⁰ Esperanza has no option to have platonic male friends or companions while she is growing up. She never considers them as role models.

"My Name"

We are then introduced to the cultural conflict of Esperanza's identity. She is named after her great grandmother, "a wild horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier."²¹ In one sentence we see that there are consequences for being fierce if you are a Mexican woman. The beautiful simile provides opportunities for students to enrich their learning through art. Esperanza makes it clear this future is not an option for her, "I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window."²² The motif of women sitting by windows appears in several places throughout the novel. But she is not finished yet. "At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth."²³ With an artful turn of phrase, our protagonist has made it clear how painful it is to be a Mexican American.

"Marin"

In this character sketch, we meet Marin, the namesake of the negative archetype of la Malinche. Marin's aspirations are that of la Malinche, "she's going to get a real job downtown because that's where the next jobs are, since you always get to look beautiful and you get to wear nice clothes and can meet someone in the subway who might marry you and take you to live in a big house far away."²⁴ Marin's dreams of having a man be her ticket out of Mango Street do not work out, she is sent back to her family by her fiancé's parents and held prisoner in her home by her aunt.

"The Family of Little Feet"

Here, Esperanza and her compatriots are given a bag of cast off high heel shoes which they make much of trying on, and the reader is introduced to the Cinderella allusion, while our heroine confronts her emerging and scary sexuality. "But the truth is it is scary to look down at your foot that is no longer yours and see attached a long long leg."²⁵ High heels make your legs look longer and attractive to the men of their subculture. The local grocer warns the girls "They are dangerous, he says. You girls too young to be wearing shoes like that. Take them shoes off before I call the cops..."²⁶ That he threatens to call the police show us just how dangerous it is to be a young, beautiful woman in this barrio, perhaps even luring them to prostitution. "If I give you a dollar will you kiss me?"²⁷ offers a less benign old man on the street to these young girls. Esperanza's dangerous loss of innocence has begun.

“Hips”

Here is the biological evidence of emerging womanhood that will divide the early adolescents from the little girls. The girls share their meager physiological and sociocultural knowledge. “It’s the bones that let you know which skeleton was a man’s and which a woman’s...They bloom like roses...The bones one day open...you gotta be able to know what to do with hips when you get them.”²⁸ At some level, the girls understand the danger of becoming a woman, and have also been transmitted the information that to be a woman is to be the temptress. In what seems like a harmless rope-jumping rhyme the girls chant, “Skip, skip, snake in your hips...the waitress with the big fat hips who pays the rent with taxi tips...says nobody in town will kiss her on the lips...”.²⁹ They know that tips earned from waiting tables will not pay the rent. One can imagine what “taxi tips” are, even if you have never heard the phrase before.

“Four Skinny Trees”

Unable to find a suitable human role model, Esperanza has turned to the trees. “They are the only ones who understand me. I understand them...They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth between their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth...four who reach and do not forget to reach.” With amazing personification and prose poetry, Cisneros shows us that Esperanza is striving for something more, much, much more. And what may be the symbolism of the four? Mexican, American, a woman, and a writer. Four sides to Esperanza’s intersectional identity.

“Sally”

While Sally is the ultimate symbol of the beautiful, dangerous, sexually active teenager in the novel, it is important to see that Esperanza does wish for part of this identity as her own. “I like your black coat and those shoes that you wear, where did you get them?...I want to buy shoes just like yours...I’m going to ask to buy the nylons too.”³⁰ However, Sally’s sexual activity has cost her not only her reputation at school but her girlfriends and the trust of her parents. It is through Esperanza’s identification with Sally that she expresses her true heart’s desire. “Do you wish your feet would one day keep walking and take you far away from Mango Street, far away and maybe your feet would stop in front of a house...there’d be no nosy neighbors watching...You could go to sleep and never have to think about who likes you and doesn’t like you...”³¹ Perhaps at some level Esperanza realizes that we need a world where any woman can be safe to express herself freely and truly be her own person. She recognizes that women are entitled to express their sexuality any way they choose.

“Beautiful and Cruel”

Esperanza’s dreams and plans grow and develop as the novel progresses to its conclusion. “I have decided not to grow up tame like the others who lay their necks on the threshold waiting for the ball and chain.”³² Imprisonment is what she sees these women of Mango Street, one and all, are headed for. For her own self, Esperanza foresees “I am the one who leaves the table like a man, without putting back the chair or picking up the plate.”³³ Now Esperanza realizes that in order to have what she wants she may have to break with a woman’s stereotyped gender role completely.

“Red Clowns”

This is the vignette where Esperanza alludes indirectly to her own experience of sexual assault. She feels

betrayed by her friend Sally and all the media and sociocultural images of romantic life she has encountered in her young life. “You’re a liar. They all lied. All the books and magazines, everything that told it wrong.”³⁴ It will be important for the teacher to spend some time unpacking this, first by the teacher’s self in order to get comfortable leading the discussion, and only then with the students. It is too easy to skip over this because it is a difficult conversation. But it is a powerful warning to young teens, and a teachable moment for the propaganda of the media regarding sex role stereotypes and romantic love.

“The Three Sisters”

It is from this allusion to the Fates, the mythological pagan goddesses, that Esperanza receives an important prophecy. Perhaps they must bring it to her because it is something she knows in her soul without knowing how it came to be. “The one with marble hands called me aside. Esperanza...When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Mango Street. You can’t forget what you know. You must remember to come back. For the ones who cannot leave as easily as you.”³⁵ One can see this as a projection of Cisneros’s own mission. She came back, not only literally to her own Chicago neighborhood, but for every young person who has a potential future greater than their past, through the timeless world of *The House on Mango Street*.

Multi-Cultural Connections

As an enrichment to this unit and its core novel, students may be encouraged to branch out their independent reading to other young adult literature with strong protagonists who break away from the expectations and limits of their past. It must be shown, via brief book talks by the teacher, that while writing is not the only way for a young person to break free from the tethers of poverty and racism, education is the necessity that paves the way in virtually all cases.

Books can be selected from other subcultures in the United States, such as *The Hate You Give* by Angie Thomas, in which Starr struggles with her cultural identity and whether she is strong enough to speak out against racism, and *Bronx Masquerade*, a novel written in verse that explores young African American men breaking out of stereotypes that confine them. An example of historical fiction which has a strong female protagonist is *The Indigo Girl* by Natasha Boyd, the story of a girl with a passion for agriculture who views the family’s slaves as human beings, which speaks to the difficulty of young women in the past breaking away from gender role expectations. Gender identity issues for LGBTQ youth are eloquently addressed in the nonfiction title *The 57 Bus*, in which a disadvantaged African American youth sets fire to the skirt of a trans youth and the reader becomes intimately acquainted with both teens.

There are also books about children in other cultures that could be introduced to the students via book talks. *Black Dove, White Raven* is the story of a white girl and black boy who are being brought up by a single female pilot in Ethiopia during the World War II, and both young people and the woman raising them confront stereotypes as well as racial and gender expectations. Lina, the protagonist of *Between Shades of Grey*, is a strong Lithuanian girl who must make choices that affect her family’s destiny in Lithuania in 1941 and defies almost certain death in a camp in the Gulag. *The Breadwinner* tells the story of Pervana in Afghanistan during the rule of the Taliban. Fed up by the socially normed gender role for a girl she must take on the identity of a male to insure her family’s survival. Faten, a female teenager in *The Servant* and her boyfriend from another

Beirut subculture must both break away from cultural and parental expectations. These novels are only a sampling of the myriad of diverse books available for teens today. Importantly, multicultural books appropriate to students' own cultures of origin should be sought by the teacher from lists that are readily available.³⁶

Structure of the Unit and Classroom Activities

Section 1. Gender Stereotypes and Expectations

The unit will begin with a definition of terms which students may have heard but not necessarily understand such as gender, stereotypes, discrimination, sexism, and feminism. As an engaging, introductory activity, students will have a chance to brainstorm lists of stereotypes and gender roles in small groups and reflect on which ones bother them or make them uncomfortable. A nonfiction text and infographic such as those found in *The Science of Gender* will be presented to dispel any notions that males and females are actually biologically different, and the roles of culture and society in forming the stereotypes and expectation explored. Students will be encouraged to share expectation from their own cultures, subcultures, and families in journal writing. The class will complete identity webs for their external and internal identities which they may return to later in the unit to come up with ideas for creative writing. The negative results of this type of stereotyping will also be explored through the use accessible nonfiction texts such as "Gender Stereotypes are Destroying Girls and Killing Boys," which illustrates destructive effects of stereotyping on girls such as depression and exposure to violence, as well as on boys such as engaging in violence and being prone to substance abuse and suicide. "Math Isn't Just for Boys" explores how a disproportionate number of males are still filling math and computer science jobs, and "Stereotypes Might Make 'Female' Hurricanes deadlier" illustrates how far reaching such stereotypes are. Throughout the reading of these nonfiction texts students will practice literacy skills such as summarizing, determining main idea, and identifying claims and evidence.

Section 2. The History of Feminism

In small groups students will choose key figures in the history of feminism to learn about and present to the class. This will allow students to practice research skills, integrate history and utilize engaging multimedia technology. Approximately one week will be allotted for the researching and presenting. Skills such as citation of research sources and speaking to the class will be practiced. In addition, the rest of the class can be required to take notes utilizing a graphic organizer during the presentations. Alternatively, the information gleaned by various groups can be shared in a jigsaw format. As mentioned above, some figures that students can research include Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, Alice Paul, Gloria Steinem, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, bell hooks, Malala Yousafzai, Audre Lorde, Alice Schwarzer, and Rigoberta Menchu.

Section 3. *The House on Mango Street*

The class may begin this section by reading and/or watching a brief biography of Sandra Cisneros, along with some introduction to the time period during which she was writing the novel placed in its context in the history of feminism. In addition, students may be shown pictures of Chicago Chicano neighborhoods during the time the author lived in them.

As a series of interconnected brief vignettes make up *The House on Mango Street*, resulting in a rich yet highly engaging and accessible text for young teens (and people of all ages). The gorgeous imagery of Cisneros' prose poems "function at the level of form of plot, and of symbolic significance."³⁷ Cisneros has a love of, and way with, similes and metaphors which allows for a foray into literary devices.

Most importantly, the vignettes of the novel can be grouped topically so students can compare how the novel portrays boys, the role of women, identity, growing up and culture. Again in small groups or individually for student who prefer, students can analyze sets of vignettes in order to make claims and support these claims with textual evidence. Key quote will also be analyzed in writing. Though each small group will explore one of these sets of vignettes, all students will read the complete text as it is not long and highly readable. Students would then, in a one page essay, draw a conclusion regarding whether the protagonist, Esperanza, is willing to accept future options available to her on Mango Street and why she ultimately feels she must leave home before she can return and change things on Mango Street.

The novel lends itself to interpretation in art. Class members can choose figurative language for illustration or other artistic interpretation. Additionally, there is a motif of women sitting by windows in the story which is perfect for a class art project where each student contributes images in a wooden grid which looks like windows in a house.

Section 4. Independent Reading and Book Projects

While the whole class is reading the core novel of the unit, students are typically also engaged in and responsible for independent reading in our school district. Students will be provided with sets of books related to gender and cultural stereotyping and expectation to choose from. In written responses, the young teenagers will be asked to respond to these works of literature, and to connect them with *The House on Mango Street* as well as with their own lives. Refugee families from the school can also be invited to speak and share their stories and their literatures. Students will be asked to choose a character from either their independent reading book or from *The House on Mango Street*, and to imagine themselves as that character either is a journal entry or letter to a character in the book. This reflection and exploration of different roles allows for the development of empathy, and also will prepare them for the final portion of the unit.

Section 5. Creative Writing

Esperanza's, and Sandra Cisneros's own breaking away from stereotyped gender roles and parental expectations provides the perfect segue into a culminating creative writing task of the type young teens find highly absorbing. Students can return to the identity webs they created at the beginning of the unit, reflect on their own identities and set of parental expectations, and then write a brief series of vignettes exploring a future in which they break free of those. Students will be encouraged to explore a broad range of societal expectations, including gender, race, sexuality, socioeconomic class and career ambitions. This would provide a true culmination of the class's study of nonfiction and fiction with their own creativity, critical thinking and have important real-life implications for their own futures.

Table of Classroom Activities

Several lesson plans have been mentioned already and a few samples will be described in detail below. Here is an overall guide to the content, strategies, and activities of the unit.

Part & Guiding Questions	Content	Strategies and Activities
1. What are gender roles and stereotypes?	<i>The Science of Gender</i> "HeForShe: Gender Equality Is Your Issue, Too" "Gender Stereotypes are Destroying Girls and Killing Boys." "Math Isn't Just for Boys." "Stereotypes Might Make 'Female' Hurricanes Deadlier."	Brainstorming Summarizing Identifying claims and evidence
2. What is the history of feminism in the United States? What are the stories of various feminist figures? How has feminism impacted male gender roles and power?	Excerpts from <i>Feminism Is</i> Internet Research	Independent and group research Evaluating sources Creating multimedia presentations
3/4. How have gender stereotypes and the need to break away from them been portrayed in diverse literature?	<i>The House on Mango Street</i> Various independent reading books	Responding to literature Studying figurative language Analyzing literature Jigsaw groups
5. How can we apply what we have learned to our own lives, in our imaginations?	Student writing	Drafting Peer response groups Editing & Revising Publishing

Lesson Plan One

Objective

Students will learn to describe, identify, and reflect on gender role stereotypes

Activities

1. Divide the class into heterogenous small groups of about 4 students each and provide groups with a large piece of paper and some markers.
2. Instruct the groups to compile a list of stereotypes and gender roles. Simply ask them to write lists of what words and roles they associate with males and with females. Give them 10 minutes to do this.
3. Bring the lists back to the whole class and share them.
4. Have each student respond to reflection questions such as:
 - a. Which of the stereotypes we discussed bothered you the most?
 - b. Why do people judge and stereotype others?

c. Where do stereotypes come from?

Assessment

Students are assessed by their participation in the small groups, the class discussion, and their written reflection.

Lesson Plan Two

Objective

Students will learn how to analyze gender stereotypes in literature using the text *The House on Mango Street*.

Activities

1. Each student will be given a copy of the text and will have had time to read it.
2. The teacher will model analysis of a small set of vignettes related to the topic of family with the whole class, and the drawing of a conclusion regarding the author's ideas about the topic of family from these vignettes. A graphic organizer or concept map will be used for this purpose.
3. Students will be assigned to one of five groups of vignettes. Each group will receive a list of vignettes which address one of the following topics: identity, culture, role of women, boys and growing up.
4. The groups will complete the same organizer using their assigned topic and vignettes.
5. The groups will be jig sawed so there is one member of each topic group in a new group. That member will then share their own topic findings with their new small group.
6. Individually, the students will choose one of the topics to write short essays about their thematic topics and draw conclusions about the purpose of the stereotypes in communicating a theme which Cisneros describes in her novel.

Assessment

Graphic organizers and essays will be completed with a rubric which is shared with the class.

Lesson Plan Three

Objective

Students will learn to develop empathy by identifying and assuming the roles of various characters.

Activities

1. Students will choose a fictional character, either from *The House on Mango Street*, or from his or her multicultural independent reading book which is being read in conjunction with the unit.
2. Student will write from the perspective of the chosen character in a chosen format.
3. Choice of formats will include a letter to a character, or journal entry.

Assessment

The letter or journal entry will be assessed using a rubric which has been shared with the students.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

Reading Standards for Literature

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.10

By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently. *The texts used in this unit include those at a high school level and beyond.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1

Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. *Students will do this when responding to the core and independent novel of this unit.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text. *Students will do this when responding to the core and independent novels of this unit.*

Reading Standards for Informational Text

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.1

Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. *Students will be responding to nonfiction articles and excerpts.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.2

Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text. *Students summarize the text they have read and cite evidence to support the central idea.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts. *All these skills will be necessary while reading the texts.*

Writing Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences. *Students will be writing a piece of narrative fiction during the final section of this unit.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. *The written responses and reflections in this unit provide plenty of opportunities for this standard.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.5

With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed. *Students will have an opportunity to peer conference their vignettes.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others. *Students will practice these skills while putting together their presentations on historical feminist figures.*

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7

Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration. *This standard applies to the short research on feminism.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.8

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation. *Same as above.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research. *There are multiple opportunities at the end of each part of the unit.*

Notes

¹ Entis, Laura. "From Classroom to Work." In *The Science of Gender*, 52-57.

² Lisa Damour in "From Classroom to Work." 55.

³ Frances Rosenbluth, personal communication, March 10, 2020.

⁴ Thebaud, S and Doering, L. "How a Job Acquires a Gender." In *The Science of Gender*, 73.

⁵ See *Feminism Is...*

⁶ In *The Science of Gender*

⁷ "Gender Stereotypes are Destroying Girls and Killing Boys." In *USA Today*, September 22, 2017.

⁸ Klein et al "Chapter 19: Undressing the Hidden Curriculum".

⁹ Maria Elena de Valdes, "In Search of Identity in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*" in *Sandra Cisneros's The House on Mango Street*, 5.

¹⁰ Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, 10.

¹¹ Annie O. Eysturoy, "*The House on Mango Street: A Space of Her Own*" in *Sandra Cisneros's The House on Mango Street*, 61-80.

¹² "More Room of Her Own: Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*" in *Sandra Cisneros's The House on Mango Street*, 31.

¹³ Eysturoy, "*The House on Mango Street: A Space of Her Own*," 68.

¹⁴ Leslie Petty, "*The "Dual"-ing of la Malinche and la Virgin de Guadalupe in Cisneros's The House on Mango Street*"

¹⁵ Petty, 129.

¹⁶ Petty, 131.

¹⁷ Petty, 133.

¹⁸ Sandra Cisneros, *The House on Mango Street*, (New Your: Vintage Books, 1984), 6.

¹⁹ Cisneros, 7.

²⁰ Cisneros, 8.

²¹ Cisneros, 10.

²² Cisneros, 11.

²³ Cisneros, 11.

²⁴ Cisneros, 26.

²⁵ Cisneros, 40.

²⁶ Cisneros, 41.

²⁷ Cisneros, 41.

²⁸ Cisneros, 50.

²⁹ Cisneros, 51.

³⁰ Cisneros, 82.

³¹ Cisneros, 82-83.

³² Cisneros, 88.

³³ Cisneros, 89.

³⁴ Cisneros, 100.

³⁵ Cisneros, 105.

³⁶ See "Global Reading:Selected Literature for Children and TeensSet in Other Countries."

³⁷ Valdes, "In Search of Identity in Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street*" 10.

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All sources listed are described in the text of this unit.

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Men on Mango Street beat their wives and daughters and confine them to the home. Just being a woman is sometimes cause enough for abuse – a fact that we observe in the beatings that Sally constantly receives, and in Esperanza's rape. What effects does her refusal to abide by traditional gender roles have? Chew on This. In *The House on Mango Street*, gender is portrayed as a social construction – something that people learn as they grow up, not something they're born with. Men have it easy on Mango Street – it's much easier for the male characters of the novel to live up to the gender role prescribed for them than it is for women. Previous Next.

Navigation. In the house of mango street Esperanza describes as possible role models Marin Alicia Sire's girlfriend Lois Sally. What does she admire about each of these women? What things can they teach her? Role socialisation and gender? These are not the same thing. Gender (identity, presumably) is who you are, while gender role socialization is how you relate your gender identity to the world in terms of appearance and behaviors. Because you feel like a woman (gender identity), you dress as a woman (gender role). Does gender play a role in sexual orientation? Gender roles in society means how we're expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves based upon our assigned sex. For example, girls and women are generally expected to dress in typically feminine ways and be polite, accommodating, and nurturing. Men are generally expected to be strong, aggressive, and bold. Every society, ethnic group, and culture has gender role expectations, but they can be very different from group to group. They can also change in the same society over time. For example, pink used to be considered a masculine color in the U.S. while blue was considered femi