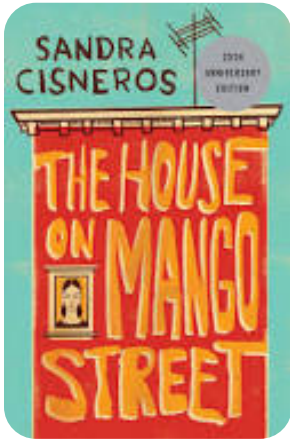


A WISE book discussion

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros



The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros shares the world from the point of view of a young Mexican girl named Esperanza. Growing up in the Latinx section of Chicago, Esperanza both experiences and observes the stifling nature of gender stereotypes, rape culture, and gender-based violence. She yearns to escape a house of her own someday, both wanting to belong on Mango Street and leave it behind.

Esperanza notices the ways that “boys and girls live in separate worlds.” While she cannot always name it, she feels the pressure of gender stereotypes. ***How do we see boys and girls living in separate worlds in our own lives? Are boys and girls treated differently?***

When the boys steal Sally’s keys and make her kiss them to get her keys back, Esperanza feels scared for her friend. She asks one of the boys’ mom for help, but his mom tells her it is not a big deal. ***What message does this give Esperanza?***

Esperanza knows that Sally’s father hits her, but Sally says, “He never hits me hard.” Sally goes to Esperanza’s house to escape her dad, but when he comes to apologize, she returns home with him. ***Why might Sally excuse her father’s abuse? Why might survivors make excuses for their abuser’s behavior?***

Throughout the book, marriage is talked about like the ultimate goal for women and girls because it is a way for them to escape poverty. Unfortunately, like when Sally gets married, many girls escape violence from their fathers only to experience it again with their husbands. ***How can the pressure to get married be damaging or even dangerous for young girls? How might experiencing violence from a father make it easier to excuse violence from a husband? How do gender stereotypes about husbands and wives work to keep women from being who they want to be?***

Esperanza often admires the older girls in her life because they are beautiful and she sees them get attention and praise for it. But she also is told that being too beautiful is “trouble” or “dangerous,” like when Rafaela is locked indoors because her husband is afraid she will run away since she is “too beautiful to look at.” ***Why might it be confusing for young girls to be told they should be beautiful, but not too beautiful? What are the messages that girls in our culture get about their physical appearance?***

At several points in the novel, Esperanza and her friends are asked for kisses from older boys and men. When Esperanza is working at the photo store, an adult coworker asks her for a “birthday kiss.” He kisses her before she can answer, which is assault, even though Esperanza does not recognize that at the time. ***What does it say about our culture that adult men view young girls sexually? Why might Esperanza have chosen not to tell anyone about what this man did? What power did this man have over her?***

Near the end of the book, Esperanza experiences sexual violence and Sally does not help her. As she tries to explain what happened, she says, “I don’t remember. I don’t remember. Please don’t make me tell it all.” ***What can Esperanza’s retelling teach us about how survivors remember their experience(s)?***

This book focuses on the lived experiences of Latinx people in the 1980s. It can be easy to assume that problem is with Latinx culture(s), but gender-based violence happens just as much in our community. ***What are some of the norms in our culture that support violence? How might someone’s experience of violence differ based on their race, class, sexuality, or ethnicity?***