

Passage Analysis from *The House on Mango Street*

Discuss Cisneros's use of language and symbolism in the passage below to establish tone and mood, to convey theme, and to develop Esperanza's character.

Sally, do you sometimes wish you didn't have to go home? 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, a nice one with flowers and big windows and steps for you to climb up two by two upstairs to where a room is waiting for you. And if you opened the little window latch and gave it a shove, the windows would swing open, all the sky would come in. There'd be no nosy neighbors watching, no motorcycles and cars, no sheets and towels and laundry. Only trees and more trees and plenty of blue sky. And you could laugh, Sally. You could go to sleep and wake up and never have to think who likes and doesn't like you. You could close your eyes and you wouldn't have to worry what people said because you never belonged here anyway and nobody could make you sad and nobody would think you're strange because you like to dream and dream. And no one could yell at you if they saw you out in the dark leaning against a car, leaning against somebody without someone thinking you are bad, without somebody saying it is wrong, without the whole world waiting for you to make a mistake when all you wanted, all you wanted, Sally, was to love and to love and to love and to love, and no one could call that crazy.

[from "Sally," pages 82-83]

Notes on passage:

- tone is of earnest longing: Esperanza wants the feeling of freedom and independence that having her own house would give her, but she can only dream of having it
 - doesn't want to be judged or controlled; wants to be free to be comfortable, to pursue her own desires, including romantic desires
- Esperanza addresses Sally as if Sally thinks and feels the things she does; she projects her own emotions and desires on Sally: initial question thus function as a rhetorical question expressing her sense of longing, and the second sentence starts as a question but becomes a declarative sentence
- to some degree Esperanza's unhappiness may be self-imposed
 - for example, through her worrying about "who like and doesn't like [her]"
 - seems to be very sensitive to others' judgments
- conveys sense of wanting to be rescued by fate; doesn't expect to rescue herself: "your feet would one day keep walking" (lines 1-2), "a room is waiting for you" (line 4)
- the house she wishes she had symbolizes self-determination; things like flowers, trees, windows, and the sky symbolize feeling of serenity
- overriding theme is that happiness is dependent upon a sense of freedom

diction: many words and images that express intense emotion

- extreme/absolute words: "far away" (line 2), "all the sky" (line 5), repetition of "no" (lines 5-6), "more trees" (line 6), "plenty of blue sky" (line 7), "never have to think" (lines 7-8), "nobody could make you sad" (line 9), "no one could yell at you" (line 10), "the whole world" (line 12), "all you wanted" (line 13)
- words and images that express beauty, positive emotion, openness: "nice one" (line 3), "flowers" (line 3), "big windows" (line 3), "windows would swing open" (line 5), "all the sky would come in" (line 5), "trees" (line 6), "blue sky" (line 7), "laugh" (line 7)
- negative words ("no," "no one," "nobody," "never") used to express contrast between current state of helplessness and desired freedom
 - all of these expressions help convey Esperanza's desire for a calm, beautiful place far away from the demands and judgments of others
- alliteration also has emphatic effect: "no nosy neighbors" (line 5), "without somebody saying it is wrong, without the whole world waiting for you to make a mistake when all you wanted" (lines 12-13)

syntax: long, stringy sentences also help convey intense emotion

- repetition of key words and phrases: "far away" (lines 1 and 2), "trees and more trees" (line 6), negative words "no" and "nobody," "dream" (line 10), "leaning" (line 11), "without" (lines 11-12), "all you wanted" (line 13): unrestrained outpouring of emotion
 - particular emphasis on "love" (line 13): the thing that Esperanza most desires is to be able to give and receive love freely
- long sentences convey rush to express certain key ideas and feelings: measured, structured thought is lost in the intensity of the moment; thoughts are being expressed spontaneously
- special emphasis falls on short sentences that follow long sentences: "And you could laugh, Sally." (line 7)
- climax: final sentence builds to emotional high point at end