

The House on Mango Street Quote ID Quiz Answers

Quote ID

In addition to identifying the speaker and person spoken to for each quotation below, identify any people, things, or places in boldface and include them in your discussion of the quotation's significance. Fill in any blanks in the quoted text.

1. “_____ is the girl with eyes like Egypt and nylons the color of smoke. The boys at school think she's beautiful because her hair is shiny black like raven feathers and when she laughs, she flicks her hair back like a satin shawl over her shoulders and laughs.” (81: “Sally”)

Speaker: Esperanza (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: Esperanza is describing Sally, the girl she admires and envies for her beauty and independence—in particular the way she looks at school.

Significance: Although Sally faces some of the same obstacles that Esperanza does, Esperanza admires her, sympathizes with her, and wishes she could have Sally's assertive independence. Esperanza's identification with Sally and her desire to be like Sally are an example of the theme of self-assertion—the desire for freedom and independence. Sally takes refuge from her unhappy family life in her beauty and her power over boys.

2. “Then **he** starts it up and all sorts of things start happening. It's like all of a sudden he let go a million moths all over the dusty furniture and swan-neck shadows and in our bones. It's like drops of water. Or like marimbas only with a funny little plucked sound to it like if you were running your fingers across the teeth of a metal comb.” (20: “Gil's Furniture Bought & Sold”)

Speaker: Esperanza (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: Esperanza and Nenny come across a music box in Gil's shop that entrances them, but Gil is not willing to sell it.

Significance: Their attraction to the music box shows their sensitivity to beauty, even in the form of the tinny music of a music box. The box, as something beautiful but unattainable, can be seen as a symbol of the beautiful, privileged, happy lives they wish they had.

3. “I put it down on paper and then **the ghost** does not ache so much. I write it down and _____ says goodbye sometimes. **She** does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free.” (110: “Mango Says Goodbye Sometimes”)

Speaker: Esperanza (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: Esperanza is discussing Mango Street—the psychological hold it has on her and how she is sometimes able to feel liberated from it through writing.

Significance: Because many things about living on Mango Street are less than ideal, and because Esperanza has had some bad experiences there and is essentially unhappy, she wishes she could escape it, but she doesn't have the opportunity to leave—and even when she can leave, it will always have a profound influence on her personality and be part of her identity. However, through writing, she is able to achieve some degree of emotional independence and not feel so defined and limited by Mango Street. The personification of Mango Street in this quote emphasizes the depth of the emotional influence it has on her.

4. “When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at _____. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. **Four** who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be.” (75: “Four Skinny Trees”)

Speaker: Esperanza (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: Esperanza is describing the four trees that are planted on Mango Street.

Significance: These trees are like Esperanza (and other people living on Mango Street) because they are living in an environment they haven't chosen to live in, one that is not conducive to health and growth. Esperanza takes inspiration from them because they have a stubborn will to survive despite the stifling effect of the adverse conditions in which they live ("four who grew despite concrete"). They continue to exist not because they have a real hope of anything better, but simply for the sake of existence itself.

5. "And the story goes **she** never forgave **him**. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be." (11: "My Name")

Speaker: Esperanza (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: Esperanza is discussing her great-grandmother, whose name and desire for independence she inherited.

Significance: Esperanza admires her great-grandmother's independence but senses that she regretted her decision to get married because marriage forced her to live a conventional, limited life; she was unable to explore the dreams and ambitions she had for herself. Esperanza wants to avoid repeating her mistake so she can maintain her independence and find freedom and happiness. Her great-grandmother's fate is an example of the theme of male domination of women and the suffering it causes.

6. "**We** are tired of being beautiful. Lucy hides the _____ under a powerful bushel basket on the back porch, until one Tuesday her mother, who is very clean, throws them away. But no one complains." (42: "The Family of Little Feet")

Speaker: Esperanza (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: The girls (Esperanza, Nenny, Lucy, and Rachel) have just been trying on high heels and have found that men flirt with them as if they were mature women.

Significance: This is another example of the motifs of sexual maturation and male domination of women. Although the feeling of being womanly is thrilling to the girls in that it makes men pay attention to them and gives them a kind of power, it's also disturbing, both because they're not ready for to be women and because the men treat them as sex objects, not people—the men "objectify" them. Therefore, the girls are not upset when Lucy's mother throws the high heels away.

7. "**That's** nice. That's very good, **she** said in her tired voice. **You** just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free, and I said yes, but at that time I didn't know what she meant." (61: "Born Bad")

Speaker: Esperanza's terminally ill aunt

Person Spoken To: Esperanza

Context: Esperanza has just read her aunt a poem that Esperanza herself wrote. Her aunt praises the poem ("that's nice") and urges Esperanza to continue using writing as a means of coping with the difficulties and disappointments of her life.

Significance: Throughout the novel, Esperanza searches for a way to be free of the psychological influence that life on Mango Street has on her. Although she realizes that she can never entirely escape something that is so fundamentally a part of her identity, she discovers writing as a means of liberating herself emotionally, exploring the possibilities of her dreams, and developing an independent identity. When her aunt gives her this encouragement, she doesn't yet fully appreciate the power and importance of writing, but later in the novel she comes to understand what her aunt meant.

8. “She said her mama rubs lard on all the places where it hurts. Then at school she’d say she fell. That’s where all the blue places come from. That’s why her skin is always scarred.” (92: “What Sally Said”)

Speaker: Esperanza (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: Esperanza is revealing that Sally suffers physical (and emotional) abuse by her father, but Sally is ashamed and tries to hide her suffering beneath excuses, makeup, and her independent attitude.

Significance: One form that male domination of women takes is physical abuse; men punish women arbitrarily in order to control their behavior. The psychological effect of this abuse on Sally is to rob her of self-confidence and self-esteem, and it is probably for this reason that Sally dresses and acts like an aloof woman at school—she is attempting to find confirmation of her worth through sexual power and the positive reaction that boys have to her beauty. Esperanza feels compassion for her and believes that Sally shares many of the feelings and desires that Esperanza feels, and she wishes that Sally would find a different way to cope with her suffering. Unfortunately, Sally and her mother apparently feel powerless to change the situation, especially because Sally’s father always apologizes for his violence.

9. “This, I suppose, was the reason why we went there. Far away from where our mothers could find us. We and a few old dogs who lived inside the empty cars. We made a clubhouse once on the back of that old blue pickup. And besides, we liked to jump from the roof of one car to another and pretend they were giant mushrooms.” (95-96: “The Monkey Garden”)

Speaker: Esperanza (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: Esperanza is describing the Monkey Garden (“there”) and explaining its appeal to her and the children she plays with—the “reason why [they] went there” is that it’s a place where they can escape from their parents’ control (and from the reality of life on Mango Street) and engage their imaginations as innocent children.

Significance: This is another example of the motif of psychological liberation from an unpleasant place and life and the joy of that sense of freedom. Unfortunately, the Monkey Garden loses its appeal to Esperanza when Sally engages in sexual behavior there—it becomes associated in her mind with the unpleasant, disturbing forces of adult life instead of the innocence of childhood.

10. “Mama says she is a skinny thing, blond and pale like salamanders that have never seen the sun. But I saw her once too and she’s not that way at all. And the boys across the street say she is a tall red-headed lady who wears tight pink pants and green glasses. We never agree on what she looks like, but we do know this. Whenever she arrives, he holds her tight by the crook of the arm. They walk fast into the apartment, lock the door behind them and never stay long.” (71: “The Earl of Tennessee”)

Speaker: Esperanza (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: Esperanza is describing the Earl of Tennessee (“he”) and his supposed wife, who is actually a series of prostitutes that Earl brings back to his place—this is the reason for the disagreements about what she looks like and for Earl’s behavior around her (walking fast, locking the door behind them, and only staying for a short time).

Significance: Solicitation of prostitutes is one form of the sexual objectification of women; to men like Earl, these women aren’t people, but simply objects through which they can find sexual satisfaction. Sally apparently doesn’t understand what’s going on when she makes these observations, but what she does know of male sexuality she generally finds very disturbing—although she craves the attention of boys, she wants to be noticed as a person, not a mere sex object.

11. “I couldn’t make **them** go away. I couldn’t do anything but cry. I don’t remember. It was dark. I don’t remember. I don’t remember. Please don’t make me tell it all. Why did **you** leave me all alone? I waited my whole life. You’re a liar. They all lied. All the books and magazines, everything that told it wrong.” (100: “Red Clowns”)

Speaker: Esperanza

Person Spoken To: Sally

Context: Sally is deeply distraught after she has been raped, apparently by a group of boys (“them”), and she can’t bear to think about what happened. She imagined sex (“it”) to be pleasant and romantic, based on everything she’s heard about it from the media and other people, but her experience of it is horrifying (not surprisingly, because it’s not a consensual act with someone she has a relationship with).

Significance: Rape can be seen as the ultimate form of male abuse and domination of women. It is a dehumanizing, violent act that leaves its victims struggling with a great deal of pain, anger, and even self-loathing. Although Esperanza’s desire to escape Mango Street apparently predates this event, the revelation of this experience makes it clear why she is so desperate to escape: her life here is hopelessly tainted by her experience of rape.

12. “But I like **them**. Their clothes are crooked and old. They are wearing shiny Sunday shoes without socks. It makes their bald ankles all red, but I like them. Especially **the big one** who laughs with all her teeth. I like her even though she lets **the little one** do all the talking.” (15: “Our Good Day”)

Speaker: Esperanza (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: Near the beginning of the novel, Esperanza meets Lucy (“the big one”) and Rachel (“the little one”) and befriends them despite their flaws. Buying a bicycle together cements their relationship.

Significance: Esperanza befriends Lucy and Rachel in part because she is desperate for friends, but also perhaps because Lucy’s tendency to “laugh with all her teeth” shows that she expresses her emotions freely and openly; Esperanza is attracted to anyone (or anything) that conveys a sense of liberation. (Also, she is less judgmental and more empathetic than most other characters in the story.)

13. “When **you** leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can’t erase what you know. You can’t forget who you are.” (105: “The Three Sisters”)

Speaker: the “three sisters”

Person Spoken To: Esperanza

Context: The “three sisters” are apparently aunts of Lucy and Rachel’s who make an appearance at the funeral of Lucy and Rachel’s baby sister. They seem to specifically want to talk to Esperanza and act as though they can see her future, telling her that she will “go very far.” They are also apparently quite perceptive regarding her desire to escape Mango Street, and they urge her to help the others on Mango Street who don’t have the power she has to escape it.

Significance: This event relates to the motifs of liberation and identity, and it conveys the lesson of having compassion and a sense of responsibility for others. Although it is good that Esperanza will liberate herself from Mango Street, she can’t do so completely because her identity has been so profoundly influenced by her experiences there (her process of maturation and the loss of her innocence)—nor *should* she try to completely escape, because she must help others who don’t have her independence and are unable to help themselves.

14. “But I looked too long when **he** rode his bike past me. I looked because I wanted to be brave, straight into the dusty cat fur of his eyes and the bike stopped and he bumped into a parked car, bumped, and I walked fast. It made your blood freeze to have somebody look at you like that. Somebody looked at me. Somebody looked.” (72-73: “Sire”)

Speaker: Esperanza (narration)

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: Esperanza is both intimidated and fascinated by Sire (“he”), who is a powerfully masculine figure that the other girls are scared of. She is thrilled by his attention (or by the attention of any boy, for that matter), but she is also frightened by it.

Significance: As Esperanza goes through the process of growing up, she is conflicted by her feelings about males. On the one hand, she loves having their attention, which gives her a sense of self-worth and power, but she also isn’t ready to be a woman and is disturbed by sexuality, especially the way most males express it. As an apparently rebellious figure (Esperanza’s father calls him a “punk”), he probably also appeals to her desire for liberation and her respect for those who are fiercely independent.

15. “You want a friend, she says. Okay, I’ll be your friend. But only till next Tuesday. That’s when we move away. Got to. Then as if she forgot I just moved in, she says the neighborhood is getting bad.” (13: “Cathy Queen of Cats”)

Speaker: Cathy

Person Spoken To: Esperanza

Context: Esperanza is desperate for a friend, but Cathy isn’t as eager to be Esperanza’s friend because she (consciously or unconsciously) looks down on Esperanza, who represents the change in the neighborhood and the (from Cathy’s point of view) lower class of people who are moving there.

Significance: Class distinctions, racial distinctions, and the psychological effect of being conscious of these things form an important undercurrent in the novel. The attitude of people like Cathy (and the nun who seems to look down on Esperanza’s former house on Loomis) harms Esperanza’s self-image and seems to be one factor in her desire to escape Mango Street, which is a constant reminder to her of her family’s status.

16. “One day you wake up and they are there. Ready and waiting like a new Buick with the keys in the ignition. Ready to take you where? [...] They’re good for holding a baby when you’re cooking, Rachel says, turning the jump rope a little quicker. She has no imagination.” (49: “Hips”)

Speaker: Esperanza (narration), and Rachel

Person Spoken To: N/A

Context: The girls are discussing the significance of the development of hips (“they”) as girls become physically mature. Esperanza has a more sophisticated idea of their significance than Rachel, who doesn’t consciously make a connection between hips and sexuality.

Significance: The awareness of hips, which represent sexual maturity, is part of the girls’ process of physical (and psychological) maturation. Hips are like a Buick in that they are one of the things that lead to sexual experiences. Esperanza is fascinated by their power, wanting to learn to walk and dance in a provocative manner, but like everything connected with sexuality in the novel, hips also have the potential for darker and more disturbing associations.