

Writer's Model: Sandra Cisneros *The House on Mango Street*
Gwen Romero, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Summary:

Students study the style of a successful writer, then mimic elements of that writer's craft to develop their own descriptive or narrative pieces.

Objectives:

- Review and analyze key writing techniques.
- Evaluate the effects of experience on the development of an individual.
- Analyze the literal and metaphorical associations of objects/images and experience.

Context:

A seventh to twelfth-grade English/literature, humanities, or creative writing class.

Materials:

- Copies of Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* for whole class.
- Assignment handouts. *Remember to set your submission/due dates.
- **In-class:** Paper and pens/pencils, or access to word processing program.
- **Online:** Upload assignment to classroom platform.

Time Span:

Approximately two weeks.

Procedures:

1. As a class, read the first chapter of *The House on Mango Street*.
2. Review the terms in bold below and have students find examples to share with the class; list these in a shared document, on a Whiteboard (or the board), or other platform for online discussion. Remember to include comments on connotation or effect and how they convey a central meaning, theme, or point of emphasis.
 - (a) **diction** (specific word choice/phrases; not full lines/sentences) with the connotation in each,
 - (b) **imagery** (details that appeal to the senses, especially visual) and **figurative language** (simile, metaphor, hyperbole, etc.) with the connotation/point of emphasis in each, and
 - (c) **syntax** (simple vs. complex sentences, questions vs. descriptive statements, fragments vs. run-on sentences) with the effect of each to convey
 - (d) **the meaning or central theme of the passage.**

Remind students: You are looking for patterns in Cisneros' choices as a writer, not just random details.

3. Assign additional reading based on grade level and median reading rate.
4. Distribute/post the **Analysis Assignment**. Have each student (or small group) select one of the chapters from the assigned reading and complete the analysis assignment. Refer to your group analysis of the first chapter for an example.
5. Have students share their work with the class and take comments/observations (in-class or online options). Discuss what students think is most effective and makes the writing unique.
6. Have students repeat the activity, individually or in small groups, close to the end of the book.
7. Distribute/post the **Cisneros-esque Writing** assignment. Review and answer questions.
8. Have small groups share their photos (in-person or post), a synopsis of the event that gives context to the photo, and essential details from the brainstorm. Have peers comment on other details that stand out in each photo.
9. Have students complete the free-write.

10. Have the students complete typed drafts that utilize some of Cisneros's writing techniques.
11. Have students work with small groups/their writing groups: share drafts, comments on revisions (clarifying questions, use of techniques, what they would like to know more about, etc.).
12. Have students revise, edit, and submit final drafts.

Rationale:

Close studies of successful writers and their uses of a variety of techniques helps students to develop the belief that writing is a skill set (not an absolute ability) that can be mastered.

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Analysis Assignment

Due _____

Select a chapter from *The House on Mango Street*, not the one that we already analyzed together, and analyze Cisneros's use of

- (a) **diction** (specific word choice/phrases; not full lines/sentences) with the connotation in each,
- (b) **imagery** (details that appeal to the senses, especially visual) and **figurative language** (simile, metaphor, hyperbole, etc.) with the connotation/point of emphasis in each, and
- (c) **syntax** (simple vs. complex sentences, questions vs. descriptive statements, fragments vs. run-on sentences) with the effect of each to convey
- (d) **the meaning or central theme of the passage.**

You are looking for patterns in Cisneros's choices as a writer, not just random details. Use the analysis that we completed together as your example.

- Include title, pages, and a synopsis (2 or 3 sentences of summary) at the top of your page.
- Include a minimum of 3 examples of each device (example + connotation/effect), followed by your analysis of the pattern in that device. Really think about the pattern in your examples. *You should have nine examples total.
- You may type your response in the space provided or upload a Doc. Yes, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, agreement, use of third person (no I/we/you), consistent formatting, etc. are part of your score--this is a writing assignment, not *just* notes.

Cisneros-esque Writing**Part One: Pre-writing**

1. Take a few minutes a scroll through/look at photos that you have of places that you have visited, distinctive experiences that you have had, and people who have shaped you. Select one to write about and upload a copy of that photo with the rest of this assignment. *Nothing too personal.
2. Brainstorm a list of descriptive details about the photo and the story that goes with it: who, what, when, where, details in the photo, and details that stand out to you from the moment but might not be part of the photo. *Min. 15 descriptive details required (not just labels).*

Due _____ to share with class/small group/writing group

Part Two: Free-write

Now tell me the story of the photo and the moment/experience that it captures; include your descriptive details. Remember to separate the specific events from the experience into separate paragraphs. Your draft should have an introduction to set up the moment/experience, a well-developed body that helps me to experience it through your memories, and a conclusion that wraps up the event and emphasizes why this was important to you.

Due _____ to share with class/small group/writing group

Part Three: Revising

Now that you have your image, descriptive details, and free-write, it's time to apply elements of Sandra Cisneros's writing style to your writing.

Begin by reviewing your style analysis assignment(s) and any chapters from the book that were particularly vivid or distinctive to you.

Then, review Elements of Cisneros's style:

- vivid imagery

- precise diction
- key objects that are symbols for the event <--description and repetition emphasize these
- use of figurative language and sound devices
- details that appeal to multiple senses, including sounds, smells, and textures
- a variety of sentence structures (syntax): simple/direct, complex/detailed, questions, fragments, questions--to match the thought patterns and experience of the person
- paragraphs that are structured to mimic sensory input, give a sense of time, or separate actions
- patterns of description that move from general to specific details
- headings that symbolize/represent the key element in that part of the experience
- realistic dialogue that gives insight to actions and to people's personalities
- polished writing--no errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, or grammar

And, revise your writing to include elements of Cisneros's style in your description of the photo and the event it represents. You must utilize:

- imagery,
- sentence structure,
- paragraph structure,
- polished writing (Grammarly is your friend), and
- at least 2 of the other elements.

Remember to include the photo and a title with your revised draft.

*I should see an obvious difference between your free-write and your revised draft.

Due _____ to share with class/small group/writing group