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**A Change for the Better**

George Santayana once said, “The wisest mind has something left to learn.” When Santayana said this, he meant that every person still has a part of them that they can improve. Esperanza, the main character in the novella, The House on Mango Street, definitely can relate to Santayana’s words because of how much she grows throughout the novella. In The House on Mango Street, by Sandra Cisneros, Esperanza is a young girl who goes through massive changes over the course of the novella. Even though she starts off as an insecure and self-conscious girl, she grows into a confident young woman through experience and with the help of friends and family.

 Esperanza is very insecure at the beginning of the novella. A quote that supports this statement is, “You live *there*? The way she said it made me feel like nothing” (Cisneros 4,5). The way Esperanza feels after being asked where she lives reflects her lack of confidence. Merely hearing this from passerby makes her feel that the poor condition of her house determines how people judge her. In addition to Esperanza thinking her house is ugly, she further shows her insecurity when she complains about her name as well. This is shown in the quote, “In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color” (Cisneros 10). If Esperanza feels ashamed about her own name, it just shows how self-conscious she is. Esperanza does not like the way her name sounds when someone speaking English tries to pronounce it. She feels that people are not taking their time to try saying it correctly, and that

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she’s not worth the effort. In short, Esperanza feels very insecure and wishes for a change, but she slowly matures over time.

 Esperanza starts to gain confidence partway through the book. She writes a poem about how she feels. “I want to be like the waves on the sea, like the clouds in the wind, but I’m me. One day I’ll jump out of my skin. I’ll shake the sky like a hundred violins” (Cisneros 60, 61). This poem shows that Esperanza is not fully confident yet, but she has developed enough confidence to make a plan for the future. She knows what she wants, but does not have enough life experience to know how to go about getting it. However, though she is maturing, Esperanza still has lingering traces of her insecure self. This is seen when she says, “They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here” (Cisneros 74). This passage shows that Esperanza has not yet reached full confidence. She has started to personify the trees and has grouped herself with them as unwanted and unnecessary. She still has not discovered her true self and she feels like she is in the wrong place. Therefore, Esperanza is starting to build her confidence, but her insecurity still exists.

 Esperanza reaches full confidence by the end of the novella. The quote that supports this fact is, “One day I will pack my bags of books and paper. One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever” (Cisneros 110). This quote shows that Esperanza has found her true calling in life. She is talking about how she will one day leave Mango Street and pursue her passion of writing. She has achieved a level of confidence that will carry her through life. This confidence is specifically earned through Esperanza’s writing. A supporting quote for this is, “I make a story for my life, for each step my brown shoe takes. I

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say, ‘And so she trudged up the wooden stairs, her sad brown shoes taking her to the house she never liked’” (Cisneros 109). This quote shows that Esperanza can get over the troubles in her life by writing about them. This makes Esperanza more capable, and helps her look towards a better future. Thus, Esperanza has reached a high level of confidence through writing.

 Esperanza grows into a confident, capable woman, despite starting off insecure. Her self-esteem grows with her as she matures. She finds what she really wants by observing the actions of others. She discovers that writing is a way for her to escape from her troubles and a way to provide for herself. Ultimately, this novel shows that everyone has a place, whether it be big or small. They just need to work hard to find out where it is and how to get it.