

Let's Read Fall 2020
A Year of Change
House on Mango Street Model Lesson about Growing up
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- ◆ **Participant Context:** 15-19 students, university students
- ◆ **Key Learning Objectives:** Exploring the complexities of teenage years and the experiences and circumstances that help shape identity of a young person
- ◆ **Key Themes/Chapter focus:** whole book/chapters directly related to the main character Esperanza (e.g. The House on Mango Street, Chanclas, The First Job, Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark, Born Bad, Four Skinny Trees, Beautiful & Cruel, A Smart Cookie, A House on My Own, etc.)
- ◆ **Materials:** 3-5 chairs (or any objects of the same size, shape and color), a water bottle/a place to write and something to write with (more than one color if possible)
- ◆ **Time:** 60-75 min
- ◆ **Strategies used:** Great Game of Power, Role on the Wall, Complete the Image
- ◆ **Essential Question:** Who has the power?
 - What does it mean to have “power”?
 - What experiences shape a young person?
 - What does the change bring? Does it affect power dynamics?
- ◆ **Hook/Engage: The Great Game of Power (20 Mins)**

In exploring the issue of growing up it is important to note the influence of external factors to the internal change happening actively within an adolescent/a teenager. Those influences can shape a young person into a successful and confident young adult or into a frustrated person in constant search for something more, better, something undefinable. The first step into exploring this change is to analyze the factors of change, both external and internal. One of the main influences is the family and the position of a teenager in one. Therefore, it is best to start the analysis with analyzing relationships within a family in terms of control and power.

First, introduce the activity by explaining to the students that representation of power can be constructed using everyday objects and relationships between them. Place a set of four chairs (all the same or any other objects of the same shape, size and color like wooden squares or similar objects – all depending on the space available) in a row, along with a water bottle in front

of a seated group. One volunteer is asked to arrange chairs/objects and bottle in a way that one or two chairs have more power than the other three or two. Explain that any of the objects can be moved in any direction or placed on top of each other, but none of the objects can be removed altogether from the space. Everybody watches the student silently.

Another variation can be to direct one volunteer to place the chairs/objects and bottle to represent the relationship between Esperanza or teenagers and her/their parents.

Once the objects have been arranged, the volunteer joins the audience to discuss his/her thinking behind the arrangement. The whole group is asked to read the image made by the objects:

- **Describe:** *What do you see? Describe the way the chairs are positioned.*
- **Analyze:** *What does that position represent or make you think of? Why do you say that? What is another interpretation of this position? Which chair has the most power? Why? In terms of parents-children relationship, why are the two chairs in positions of power? What justification do you have for that? In terms of adults vs. the young, why are the adults in the superior position? In terms of employers vs. employees, why does the employer have the power?*
- **Relate:** (Make connections to content) *If this image represents a scene from the chapter *Chaucas/The First Job*, etc. from our book, what does this image represent? Why is this the case? If this image represents the relationship between you and your parents, what does it represent? Why?*

Encourage a number of different interpretations. Have another volunteer repeat the activity or the activity can be repeated for each of the chapters mentioned or issues related to the teenagers.

Reflection:

- *What are some of the different ways we saw power represented in this activity?*
- *What makes someone or something powerful?*
- *Who or what is powerful in our world now/was powerful then? Why?*

◆ **Explore: Role on the Wall (30 mins)**

Our next step is to visually represent all the internal and external factors shaping our main character Esperanza on a human figure map. Using this strategy, we will visually represent her internal struggle (emotions) and external factors (other people's influence) as the key shapers of her character as a young adult.

Draw a large outline of a head/shoulders or human figure on paper/board with a lot of space to write inside and outside the figure. The figure can represent the main character from the book *Esperanza* or any teenager going through her/his change. Group is invited to name out words, phrases or messages that the character receives. Write student responses on the outside of the figure. Then invite students to state who is the character or the person sending these “messages” to our character and connect it to the messages.

For example, students might state all the messages Esperanza receives directly from her parents, family, friends or neighbors or even messages she receives indirectly observing people’s behavior. In case the group decides to represent any teenager, students might state messages they themselves receive from parents, family, friends, teachers, environment and messages they receive through other media channels they are exposed to.

Next, ask students how the character might feel inside, based on the outside messages, and write those feelings on the inside of the figure with another color. Finally, ask students to connect specific “outside” messages to the inner feelings, and draw lines between those connections on the figure.

Reflection:

- *Which person(s)/character(s) shape the character of our main protagonist?*
- *Which outside factors influence her decisions to leave Mango Street and her desire to leave? Why?*
- *Why does Esperanza feel so isolated?*
- *What events, people or actions impact this person the most? Why?*
- *Is this a realistic portrait of Esperanza/teenager/you? Why or why not?*
- *Does this character/person ever shift or change? Is there something that could make a change?*
- *How does the character feel as a result of all of these opinions about her/his actions? Why?*

Possible Variations/Applications:

- Generate feelings first, then use those to come up with the outer actions of a character.
- Invite students to use textual references from the book and chapters mentioned to support their answers.
- Have groups work in small groups or individually on their own role on the wall character map.

◆ Reflect: Complete the Image (20 mins)

As a reflection activity we used a silent activity as a metaphor to this inner, often very silent period of life with a turbulence on the inside.

First everyone sits down facing the open space of the room or in a big circle with enough space inside the circle. Model the activity with a volunteer coming up front. Show the students that the activity starts by shaking hands between staging partners and at the shout of “freeze” the protagonists freeze in this position showing two imaginary characters from the book. The frozen protagonists should express the relationship of two characters from the book or from the discussion from the previous activity using their facial and body expressions.

Ask two other students to imagine two characters from the book (e.g. Esperanza and her mother/uncle/friend...) or from their life and start the activity. Students come up front, shake hands and at the shout “freeze” remain in their positions.

Ask the group to...

Describe: What do you see? What makes you say that?

Analyze: What is going on in the image between those two people? What relationships do you see and/or what the story is in this situation?

Get as many interpretations as you can.

Then, relax one of the frozen people and let them sit down. The other person stays frozen. Invite someone else in the group to come up and create a new frozen image by placing themselves in relation to the already frozen person. They can be touching the person or be separate. Once again, ask the group what they see. Follow the questioning sequence above.

Then relax the original person in the image, and a new person comes in. Do this a few times, have one person go out, and then explain how the rest of the game will work. You can use a new person for the example, or use yourself.

As the second part of the activity, everyone takes a partner and continues doing this activity with their partner silently. The group gets into partners and plays for five to fifteen minutes. Two people shake hands, look at each other and freeze. One of them unfreezes, looks at their frozen partner, and takes a new position. This keeps repeating so it's a constant flow: both frozen; one unfreezes, looks, adds back in; both frozen for two or three seconds; the other unfreezes; and so on.

As this is a silent activity, the images can be realistic and taken from the book and everyday activity, such as the dancing scene from chapter Chanclas or from any other chapter, or they can be abstract based on a theme or idea, like friendship, family relation, loneliness, growing up.

The variation of the activity can be related to the chapters of the book where students could get up in front and in pairs show different relationships between Esperanza and characters that

influenced her growing up during one key year in her life. The pair could be guided with prompts and themes or names of characters from the book.

In the end, everyone relaxes and the group discusses the feelings and emotions felt during their freeze time. It is metaphorical to express silently all the emotions Esperanza or a teenager feels on the inside, since that is truly what happens within each teenager.

Reflection:

- *What did you notice about yourself in performing this activity?*
- *What did you notice about images that were created?*
- *Did you connect to Esperanza and her feelings while staying frozen?*
- *What did you notice in relation to feelings while being silent?*
- *Did you feel restricted while not using words?*
- *Did you feel lonely when presenting Esperanza/a teenager?*
- *How was it different to do it in pairs as opposed to do it in a group?*
- *How was it different when you imagined a person as opposed to being given an idea or a theme?*

The aim of the activity is to point to the feeling and change occurring within each teenager including Esperanza during the process of growing up and how one year can make a big change in shaping a person to become a self-confident, mature person or an unstable and insecure one.