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**The Three Women**

George Santayana once said, “The wisest mind has something left to learn.” Esperanza is a great example of Santayana’s words. Esperanza is the main character of Sandra Cisneros’s novella *The House on Mango Street.* In this novella Esperanza faces many challenges and meets many people that help her to grow up to be who she truly is. Throughout the book, there are three women who influence her the most, Sally, Marin, and Alicia. Esperanza is influenced by these three women because they all have different life lessons to teach her that will help her discover who she is and how she can achieve her dreams.

Esperanza is influenced throughout the book by Sally. For example, Sally introduces the idea of having feelings for boys, “I said, Sally, come on, but she wouldn’t. She stayed by the curb talking to Tito and his friends” (Cisneros 96). In this passage, Sally leaves Esperanza to talk to some boys. Esperanza does not understand why Sally would leave her for them. This make Esperanza think about the boys and how Sally is drawn to them which gives her the idea that she too should have feelings towards young men. At the same time, Sally affects Esperanza in negative ways. For instance, Sally abuses Esperanza’s trust and puts her in a bad situation, “Sally, you lied It wasn’t what you said at all” (Cisneros 99). In this quote, Esperanza is referring to a time where Sally leaves her with a boy who rapes her. Sally tells her it will be wonderful to have sex but Esperanza is not ready for it. In this way, Sally has affected her negatively by taking this special experience away from her and replacing

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it with something terrible. These reasons show how Sally influences Esperanza throughout the book.

Marin is another character who affects Esperanza greatly. Marin is a character who helps Esperanza to grow up. For example, “She is the one who told us how Davey the baby’s sister got pregnant and what cream is best for taking off mustache hair and if you count the white flecks on your fingernails you can know how many boys are thinking of you and lots of other things I can’t remember” (Cisneros 27). In this quote, Esperanza explains all the different advice and stories Marin tells her. She is like the older sister Esperanza has never had she and affects her by being someone she can look up to who is wise and someone who can tell her the little secrets of life. She also influences her indirectly by relying on men to give her a better life. Esperanza learns from what Marin does and how she plans her life, “Marin, under the streetlight, dancing by herself, is singing the same song somewhere. I know. Is waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life” (Cisneros 27). Esperanza paints a picture with these words showing Marin’s plan for getting out of Mango Street. Esperanza sees how this could be a path for her too, but, she realizes how Marin is unsuccessful so she chooses to be independent and not have to rely on men in her life. This is a big lesson Marin teaches Esperanza. From these examples, it is obvious Marin influences Esperanza greatly throughout the book.

Alicia is another character who influences Esperanza. Alicia helps Esperanza understand who she is. “No, Alicia said. Like it or not you are Mango Street, and one day you’ll come back too” (Cisneros 107). In this quote, Alicia tells Esperanza that Mango Street is where she has grown up and that even though she does not like the place, she will come back to help make it

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better. In this way she influences Esperanza because she is being a friend by helping Esperanza understand who she truly is and what her purpose is. This is not the only way Alicia affects Esperanza. Another way she guides Esperanza is by showing her how she can get out of Mango Street. “Is a good girl, my friends, studies all night and sees the mice, the ones her father do not exist” (Cisneros 32). In this vignette, Esperanza explains how Alicia focuses on her studies so she can hopefully one day go to college to escape her abusive father. Esperanza wants to escape Mango Street as well and is shown that school can be a way out from Alicia’s example. From both of these examples it is shown that Alicia affects Esperanza very positively throughout the book.

Sally, Marin and Alicia teach Esperanza who she is and what she can be which all contributes to how the show her ways she can get out of Mango Street. These three women each teach her specific lessons that influence her life. Together, they teach her what she needs to know to grow up, what her purpose is and how she can achieve her dreams of escaping the poverty Mango Street so she can have a better life for herself. The biggest lesson that people can learn from these women is to observe others, take their advice and learn from their mistakes. Esperanza is the example of this as she is shown to be a successful and strong person due to her learning from others.