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### What Is Lost?

What do we lose when we become adults? The culture we live in today spends all of its energy glorifying the adult world of relationships, independence, and jobs. As a child, we are always dreaming of “what we want to be when we grow up” and working in school to achieve our goal of getting a dream job. Our teachers tell us that the skills we are learning will help us succeed as adults. In our groups of friends we always tried to talk like the popular singers and dress like our favorite actor. Cisneros in her book The House on Mango Street writes about this confusing period of adolescence in the story of a young girl named Esperanza’s coming of age. Cisneros writes short chapters in her book that give readers snapshots into different scenes in Esperanza’s life as she matures. Through the chapters “The Family of Little Feet”, “The Monkey Garden”, and “Red Clowns”, Cisneros illustrates how a young girl goes from dreaming of becoming a woman to wishing that she could regain her innocence.

Cisneros first shows her theme of “coming of age” in the chapter of “The Family of Little Feet”. In this chapter, Esperanza and her friends Rachel and Lucy are given an exciting present: heels. To the girls, heels are especially symbolic of being a woman. Cisneros tells of the girls’ excitement when Esperanza says, “Hurray! Today we are Cinderella because our feet fit exactly, and we laugh at Rachel’s one foot with a girl’s gray sock and a lady’s high heel” (40). At this point the girls think of themselves as playing “dress-up”, and of the heels as harmless. The contrast in between the girls’ youth and innocence and the world of the adults is illustrated by the intentional contrast in between the “*girl’s* gray sock” and the “*lady’s* high heel” on each of Rachel’s feet. Almost like a continuation of their game the girls go “strutting” down the street and get attention from both boys and girls their age and older. However their fun turns sour when a bum makes scary comments at them and they run away. Esperanza states, “We are tired

of being beautiful. Lucy hides the...shoes...on the back porch, until one Tuesday her mother, who is very clean, throws them away. But no one complains” (42). The girls desired to look like women, but became scared when they realized that being an adult and looking appealing can be dangerous. They became content to stay as children.

Esperanza’s transition into adulthood is further highlighted in the chapter of “The Monkey Garden”. In this chapter Esperanza comes face-to-face with her childhood and the adult world colliding in her favorite garden where she played when she was a small child. Esperanza has a friend named Sally who has a questionable reputation with the boys in the neighborhood. The boys try to manipulate Sally into kissing each one of them and she gives in following them into the garden. Esperanza wants to help Sally, so she says “I...ran back down three flights of stairs where Sally needed to be saved...But when I got there Sally said go home...They all looked at me as if *I* was the one that was crazy and made me feel ashamed” (97). This incident is shocking and confusing for Esperanza. She is still innocent and thinks that Sally needs “saving” but rather Sally wants the boys to take advantage of her. This is extremely upsetting for Esperanza who cannot understand why Sally would act this way. She is so upset she says “I wanted to will my blood to stop, my heart to stop pumping” (97) and “The garden that had been such a good place to play didn’t seem mine either” (98). Sally, through her actions with the boys, was able to steal a piece of Esperanza’s childish youth and innocence and Esperanza is deeply affected by this loss.

The ability of Sally to rob Esperanza of her innocence is once more shown in the chapter “Red Clowns”. In this chapter Esperanza completely loses her innocence in a sad and tragic way: she is raped. She takes out her anger of this happening to her on Sally because Sally abandoned her at a carnival where she gets attacked by a group of boys. Esperanza states “Sally, you lied. It wasn’t what you said at all. What he did. Where he touched me. I didn’t want it Sally...why did you lie to me?” (99). Sally had been telling Esperanza that sleeping with boys would be enjoyable and Esperanza feels completely betrayed by Sally and the world, which glorified what had been for her such a horrible experience. In this drastic way, Esperanza is forced to come to grips with the adult world and the fact her innocence had been stolen from her. Esperanza has dreamed

her whole life of being an adult and only to find all her dreams ruined. “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 told it wrong” (100). Esperanza is shocked that the world she had been edifying is actually cruel, dangerous and deceitful.

Through three chapters in her book The House on Mango Street Cisneros shows the coming of age of a young girl named Esperanza. We as readers are able to see Esperanza dream of becoming a “lady” in “The Family of Little Feet” and then realizing that she does not want to be looked at as a lady anymore when she has a scary interaction with a bum. Esperanza further realizes that she does not fully want to enter the adult world when she sees Sally’s behavior in “The Monkey Garden”. Sadly, however, Esperanza is forced to let go of her innocence when she is raped in “Red Clowns”. Through the journey of Esperanza, Cisneros is able to show readers how truly difficult it can be to become an adult. Although as children we tend to glorify the fast paced grown-up lifestyle, something beautiful is lost in the transition. We in the process must discover that “the world has lied to us”, there are harsh realities to face and often we must let go of the most sacred parts of ourselves. In a society that is in such a hurry to make children into adults, there is something to be said for an author like Cisneros with the insight to say: let children maintain their innocence while they can, before they must realize the bitter realities they will have to face. What is wrong with being a kid anyway, especially when it saves you from having to face the world?