

A Girl Called Daydreamer: A Story of Us All

Paula Simonson, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Summary:

In this short, introductory lesson, students will read, discuss and conduct an informal analysis of a short story entitled, “A Girl Called Daydreamer” written by Sandra Cisneros from *A House of My Own - Stories from My Life*.

Students will have the opportunity to reflect on personal times of isolation and make connections to Cisneros’ account of withdrawal and separation. This lesson may be taught independently or as an introduction to the works of Sandra Cisneros. This lesson can also be an introduction for two additional lessons: *A House of My Own: A Drive for Solitude* and *Death of an Innocent: A Misunderstood Journey*. Both of these lessons are included in this collection.

Objectives:

- After reading, analyzing and discussing “A Girl Called Daydreamer,” students will be able to identify similarities/differences based on personal experiences.
- Students will write a short, informal narrative reflecting on a similar time or experience from their own past.
- Students will participate in a group discussion about the power of words and labels which can cause unintended isolation to themselves and others.
- Students will respond to a single or multiple essay questions from the reading.

Context:

This lesson can be used in secondary classrooms but could also be adapted to upper elementary grades.

Materials:

- Classroom copies of “A Girl Called Daydreamer” from *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life*.

Time Frame:

This lesson can be taught in as few as two class periods or may be extended for deeper level activities and/or discussion.

Procedures:

1. Begin with a prewriting activity. Ask students to write about a strong personal memory involving a time when another person’s words caused them to withdraw or feel isolated.
Allow adequate time for students to produce a sharable piece of writing.

2. Offer students the opportunity to share writing/memory with the class or in small groups or pairs. Many students are slow to share at this point and you may choose to move this step to the end of the lesson.
3. Distribute or digitally share copies of “A Girl Called Daydreamer.” Encourage students to annotate text while reading - focusing on parts that are personally relatable.
4. Next, read the story as a group while students follow and annotate.
5. After reading, give students an opportunity to ask questions about the text, including religious references that may be confusing.
6. Use the following questions for a guided group discussion of the text or use the questions as essay style responses:
 - In her introduction to the story, Cisneros recounts her “childhood panic of school” (Cisneros 265). How can you relate to similar situations from your own childhood experiences?
 - Respond in discussion or writing to the following quote: “I remember I’d wake up sick with fear, often bleating, “Ma, I don’t want to go to school today.” “So don’t go,” she’d say without a “How come?” or “You better.” God knows why she was lenient with me. Maybe she intuited my unhappiness. I felt *susto*, terror, from the third grade through sixth. This memory is so strong, it overwhelms me every time I visit an elementary school to speak even now. Thankfully it wears off once I start talking” (Cisneros 265). Do you think Cisneros’ mother handled the situation in the best way? Explain.
 - Cisneros vividly describes her mother’s reaction to being called to the school to discuss “something awful” as well as the inconvenience for the rest of her family because of Cisneros’ actions (Cisneros 266). As a fifth grader, how can you imagine this experience would have impacted you? Would you react differently now that you are older? Explain.
 - What portion of the text is an example of hyperbole?
 - Sister Mary Regina Immaculata of the Holy Ghost Most High accused Cisneros of being a daydreamer. Have you ever found yourself in an embarrassing situation after being caught up in a daydream? Explain.
 - After being called a daydreamer, Cisneros describes being “ashamed to raise my hand for the rest of the school year...” (267). This is a powerful example of the impact of words and labels. How do you think her teacher could have handled this situation in a more productive manner? Have you ever been the victim of thoughtless words? Explain.
 - What may have happened to Cisneros’ future if she had not had an encounter with “kind and compassionate lay teachers and nuns who discovered I was an artist and writer” (Cisneros 268)?
 - As an adult, Cisneros has been able to look back and find gratitude for being a daydreamer instead of embarrassment. Read back over the final paragraph and write a personal reflection. How might you be able to learn to grow from these types of experiences while you are still young?

- Even though this story was told from the perspective of a fifth-grade girl, in what ways do you suppose that we can all relate to Cisneros' story? Does this have the potential to help us feel more connected and less isolated?

Extensions:**Creative Writing**

Cisneros shares an imaginary story that she created about her classmate, Salvador. Have students put themselves in Salvador's shoes and write a similar story about a fifth grade Sandra Cisneros.

Rationale:

This lesson will help students to understand the power and impact of words and labels. Students will also have the opportunity to consider how differently people are impacted by words and labels and the negative impacts that isolation can have on a person.

Resources:

Cisneros, Sandra. *A House of My Own - Stories from My Life*. New York: Vintage Books, 2015.

Print.

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