

No Place Like Home: The Place Where You Become Yourself

Paula Simonson, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Summary:

In this lesson, students will read, discuss and conduct an informal analysis of a short story entitled, “No Place Like Home,” written by Sandra Cisneros from *A House of My Own - Stories from My Life*.

Students will have the opportunity to read, consider, and discuss how parts of their own journey compare to Cisneros’ struggle to find connection and community.

This lesson may be taught independently or as an introduction to the works of Sandra Cisneros.

Objectives:

- After reading, analyzing and discussing “No Place Like Home,” students will be able to identify what elements create a sense of community and belonging.
- Students will consider the connection to cultural roots and traditions.
- Students will understand how isolation can often lead to important connections and relationships.

Context:

This lesson can be used with 9th, 10th 11th, and 12th grade ELA students.

Materials:

- Classroom copies of “No Place Like Home” from *A House of My Own: Stories from My Life*.

Time Frame:

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

Procedures:

1. Using the title, “No Place Like Home” as a writing prompt, ask students to free-write a short narrative based on a personal experience. Allow students at least 15 minutes to complete the free-write.
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 “No Place Like Home.” 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 or share impactful passages.
6. Divide students into small discussion groups and assign each group one of the following questions:
 - a. Cisneros writes, “So often you have to run away from home and visit other homes first before you can clearly see your own” (Cisneros 34). Explain what the author is saying in this quote and relate it to a personal experience. Is Cisneros encouraging kids to run away from home? Explain.
 - b. After growing up in the very urban setting of Chicago, Cisneros found herself in “...Iowa for graduate school. It held up a mirror to myself and allowed me to see what made me different from my workshop classmates, to go home to my Chicago childhood, to the neighborhood and people only I knew, the stories that were mine alone and not those of my brothers or cousins or friends” (Cisneros 34-35). How do you imagine this realization may have helped Cisneros find her own voice and differentiate herself from the others in her workshop? Imagine and discuss the challenges you might face when first leaving home. How might telling/writing your stories help to overcome isolation/loneliness?
 - c. “Maybe I was never more homeless than during those two years in graduate school. I found my home in the country-folk monologues of Mexican writer Juan Rulfo, the anti-poetics of Chilean poet Nicanor Parra, the rage of Malcolm X” (Cisneros 35). Quickly do a Google search of the people Cisneros names and then discuss how/why these writings may have given Cisneros a “home.” Has a book/author ever made you feel this way? Explain.
 - d. Consider the following quote, “We find ourselves at home, or homing, in books that allow us to become more ourselves. Home is “is not just the place where you were born,” as travel writer Pico Iyer once noted. “It’s the place where you become yourself” (Cisneros 35). Discuss this quote and explain what the author is telling the reader. Have you ever felt the need to find a way to “become yourself?” What does that even mean?
 - e. Read back over page page 36 and the first paragraph of page 37. Poniatowska’s section of dialogue captures the struggle of not fitting in because of how one may look. Cisneros goes on to say that, “Some artists belong very much. Perhaps not so much to their home country, but their adopted one. Discuss and explain these quotes. Have you ever felt like you would fit better into another country, family, school, etc? Explain.
7. After students have had ample time to discuss, have the groups share a brief overview of the outcome. The discussion of this lesson offers a great opportunity to dig into some of the deeper issues facing students who are coming of age and possibly fearful of leaving home.

Extensions:

- “No Place Like Home” is filled with references to a wide range of literature and authors. Consider broadening the lesson by having students research one or more of the authors, including some of their works.
- This lesson can be extended by adding Cisneros’ story, also from *A House of My Own - Stories from My Life* called, “A Borrowed House” (Cisneros 341-349). This story would allow for discussion of isolation due to feeling less attractive or the general struggle to fit in.
- Cisneros refers to an impactful children’s book called *The Little House*” by Virginia Lee Burton. This book would be a great opener or closer for this lesson and offers some great visuals for the challenges of change and a sense of home/belonging.
- Have students create their own poster emulating the Game of Life. They should include the traceable journey leading to adulthood, including pictures/drawings to capture each of the obstacles/phases of how they see their own future.

Rationale:

This lesson will help students to understand and consider the importance of home and place; as well as the need to find connection even when feeling displaced.

Resources:

Burton, Virginia Lee. *The Little House*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1942. Print.

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

Contact Information: pasimonson@wsd.net