

Choices: “A Smart Cookie”

Introducing the Story

This short descriptive piece is just one vignette from Sandra Cisneros’ award winning book, **The House on Mango Street**. The daughter, Esperanza, describes a scene and conversation that she had with her mother. Because her mother is an opera singer, she makes reference to a favorite opera called **Madame Butterfly**. In an opera all parts of the drama are sung rather than spoken. Following is a summary of the classic story.



Madame Butterfly is an opera composed by Italian Giacomo Puccini in 1904. A young Japanese woman is called Butterfly by her friends because she wears brightly colored clothes and she is unable to concentrate on one thing for very long. As a young woman, Butterfly enters a contract arrangement with an American Naval officer. They live happily on a hillside until the officer returns to America. Madame Butterfly waits for his return even though she is encouraged by others to move onto another relationship. When he returns he tells her that he has an American wife now as a result she kills herself with her father’s sword.

After you read this selection think about the mother’s reference to this opera as you read the story.

New vocabulary

Record has many meanings; one is a plastic or vinyl music disk which contains music to be played using a phonograph.

Oatmeal is made when grains of oats are pounded into flakes. It is often cooked with milk or water to make a porridge that can be eaten for breakfast with milk and sugar.

A person is *disgusted* when he or she has strong feelings of horrified disapproval.

A Smart Cookie is on pp. 90-91 of The House on Mango Street

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BEFORE READING

Vocabulary: Connect the names of the flowers or plants with its picture.



Morning Glories

Tulips

Oats

Rosebuds

Reading Comprehension - Question-Answer Relationships

“Right There” Questions

1. What was Esperanza’s mother good at?
2. Where does Esperanza’s mother borrow opera records from?

“Think and Search” Questions

3. What advice did Esperanza’s mother give her?
4. Why was Esperanza’s mother disgusted with herself?

“Author and You” Questions

5. Why doesn’t Esperanza’s mother want her to be like Madame Butterfly?
6. Explain the image of this phrase, “velvety lungs powerful as morning glories.”
7. What is the moral or lesson that the mother is trying to impress upon the daughter in the story?

“On your own” Questions

8. Do you know anyone who dropped out of school or didn’t start school because he or she didn’t have nice school clothes? How would you convince them that it is important to go to school?
9. Esperanza’s mother says that her two friends are different from Madame Butterfly. How do you think they are different? Should Esperanza be like her mother’s friends or Madame Butterfly?

Writing

Discuss in pairs or a small group then write a paragraph telling your friend-

What advantages he or she might have by finishing secondary school? or

What advantages might he or she have in the future if they learn English well?