The House on Mango Street Vignette Series - 65 points
DUE DATE: TUESDAY 11/20 (B Block) OR WEDNESDAY 11/21 (A/C/D Blocks)

ASSIGNMENT:
Write a collection of six vignettes about your personal experience in the style of Sandra Cisneros.

GOALS: While doing this project, you will:
- analyze Sandra Cisneros' writing style;
- reflect on your own experience and select people, moments, and events that have shaped your identity;
- choose a theme and a motif from your experience that are meaningful to you;
- draft and revise vignettes modeled on those in The House on Mango Street. Your vignettes should emulate Cisneros's style, reflect your experience, and develop your theme and motif.

STEPS TO COMPLETION - some of this will happen in class and some will be homework.

WEEK OF 11/5
1. Class: Complete the "Hairs" activity to practice identifying and imitating elements of Cisneros's style.
2. Homework: Plan your vignette series as follows:
   a. Brainstorm memories that are important or interesting to you. Also brainstorm aspects of your identity that are important to you (e.g., name, hairstyle, religion, family members, friends, activities, etc.). Have a look at your "Where I'm From" poem from September and personal hero's journey story from October for some ideas to start you off. If you're still stuck, try this "brainstorm survey":
   b. Choose the six ideas from your brainstorm about which you think you'll have the most to say.
   c. Find a theme that unifies these six ideas, keeping in mind that it may not be obvious right away. Look at the themes in Mango Street. This theme is in addition to the theme of identity, which is already the implied focus of your series. Try one of Cisneros's themes, or another. Here are some suggestions: Transitions, Loneliness, Mentors, Loss, Secrets, Procrastination, Faith … there are many possibilities.
   d. Choose a motif - an object, phrase, image, or idea - that supports your theme. Again, you might find one in your "Where I'm From" poem. Or perhaps you generated a key image or metaphor in your practice vignette that you could use.
   e. Put your topics in a specific order to reflect the shaping of your identity and the development of your second theme, with a clear climax and resolution in the final vignettes.
   f. Outline theme, motif and six vignette topics on the attached template for homework credit.
**WEEK OF 11/12**

3. Draft your six vignettes.
4. Revise your vignettes. See guidelines for revision below.

5. Title each of your vignettes.
6. Format your collection of vignettes. On a laptop or desktop computer (not your iPad), put all the vignettes into one document. Each vignette should start on a new page in your document. Each should be ¾ - 2 pages double-spaced, complete with a title centered at the top of the page. You may use any legible font.

**WEEK OF 11/19 (Thanksgiving week!)**

7. Create a title for the collection.
8. Create a table of contents for the collection.
9. Design a cover for your collection with your series title and your name.

10. Use the attached rubric to make sure you’ve included everything you need in your project.
11. Make final revisions and formatting adjustments to your document.
12. Print and assemble your vignette project.
13. Turn in your project on our last class before Thanksgiving. If you are traveling and will miss our last class (Tuesday or Wednesday), please turn in your project early!!

---

**Guidelines for Revising Your Vignettes**

Be sure you turn in all rough drafts with your final draft, because I will be looking for evidence of REVISION. Each vignette should be 1-2 pages typed double-spaced. You should have six vignettes.

Try ADDING more of these:

- Sensory detail and figurative language - what can we see, hear, taste, touch, smell?
  - Sharp, original imagery
    - “the slap of leather against leather”
    - cat described as “a little white fluffball who finally grew into her ears”
  - Similes
    - A face “red like vine ripe tomatoes”, a home “like a letter that gets lost in the mail”
  - Metaphors
    - “My name is a tall woman in riding boots.”
    - “Climbing on the playground until you are too big to fit on the little swings” is a metaphor for growing up
    - Consider also using extended metaphors - like epic similes. (The four skinny trees, the monkey garden)
  - Synecdoche
    - Examples in Mango Street: Little feet, hairs

- Repeated words (for effect)
- Dialogue or scattered spoken lines
  - Grandma, can I get a Popsicle?

- Poetic sound elements
  - Alliteration (same sound at the start of a series)
  - Rhyme
  - Onomatopoeia (words that sound like what they are - buzz, click, boing, chirp, etc., etc.)
CUT these:

- Quotation marks.
- Clichés (overused phrases, images, ideas) - if you've heard it before, we've heard it before
  - "The love, the smiles, and all of the laughs."
  - "follow in her footsteps"
  - "fast as a rocket"
  - "my problems seem to melt away"
- Narratives, transitions, explanations - THIS IS NOT AN ESSAY. Show, don't tell!
  - "I am unsure and nervous on how the night will go."
  - "Missing your favorite place is a very hard thing."
  - "Being separated gives me the ability to sit in my favorite place."

More ways to REVISE:

- Replace GENERALITIES with SPECIFICS.
- Create sentences of varying lengths and structures.
  - You are working for RHYTHM but they should still make sense. Try including:
    - Some fragments.
    - Unexpected syntax.
    - Some long, loose sentences and run-ons.
- Pay attention to paragraphing.
  - The first and last sentences of paragraphs have added impact simply by their placement.
  - Choose and construct first and last sentences carefully.
  - Nothing introductory - just BE IN THE MOMENT.
  - No conclusion - end with a line that will resonate.
- Consider including these:
  - Mixed verb tenses, with emphasis on present tense
  - Italicized words and phrases
  - Foreign words and phrases
  - Nonsense words
  - Song lyrics
  - Brand names

Don't forget TITLES!

- Each vignette should have an original, interesting title; the collection should also have a title.
- Collection title can be one of the vignette titles OR something else.
- Capitalize according to rules for capitalizing titles!
- Don't make the title a different size than the text. No underline, bold, italics, quotes (unless a quoted phrase), word art, or otherwise weird formatting.

Some good titles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Franstead Boys &amp; 3 Girls</th>
<th>To-Do Lists</th>
<th>Pots &amp; Pans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woof Woof Bark Bark</td>
<td>Drop, Boom, Flash</td>
<td>Still as a Tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose Pants</td>
<td>Strawberry Milk</td>
<td>Spraying Snow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kicks</td>
<td>People Assume I'm Irish</td>
<td>A Wall of Luas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What is and is not a vignette?

A vignette captures impressions, images, moments in time. It is NOT an essay. It may tell a story, but it has no distance from the story.

This first draft, by a real live student, reads more like an essay. What’s more, it is a boring essay, quite devoid of personality -- ironic, considering the title.

**NOT A VIGNETTE**

My Passions

Baseball and music are my two real passions in life. Baseball, I’ve been playing for 5 years and it has begun to play a big role in everything I do. It has taught me discipline, patience and teamwork. I also really enjoy playing. Piano has shaped my life. 11 years after my first lesson I have learned a vast majority of types of music and I have written. There is rarely a day where I am not seated at the piano either practicing or just messing around. Music has been very influential and I want to be doing it for the rest of my life.

By contrast, in Cisnerosian vignettes, you want to avoid abstractions, generalizations, narrative and explanation. Show, don't tell. Be completely in the moment: sometimes writing in the present tense helps -- though it did not help the author of "My Passions."

Here is a stab at the opening a vignette about playing the piano that reads more like Cisneros: strong imagery and figurative language, sentence fragments, loose syntax. Share an experience. Think "snapshot."

**START OF A VIGNETTE**

Eleven Years After My First Lesson

Plink plink. My fingers like tiny hammers on the dusty keys. Suddenly a melody explodes from my hands and I’m in another place. Fur Elise by Beethoven: the sad little tune in A minor, a girl looking down at the water she’s afraid to dive into....

(continue from here!)

**Suggestion:**

Try starting with one of Cisneros’s vignettes and model yours on it, even down to using some of the same sentence stems. On the next page, as an example, is a vignette I wrote about my name, based on Cisneros's vignette.
In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing.

It was my great-grandmother’s name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse—which is supposed to be bad luck if you’re born female—but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don’t like their women strong.

My great-grandmother. I would’ve liked to have known her, a wild, horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn’t marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That’s the way he did it.

And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn’t be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don’t want to inherit her place by the window.

At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister’s name Magdalena—which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least—can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza. Would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.

In Latin my name means noble. In New Jersey it means snob. It means tea and crumpets. It means a tall woman in riding boots. But no one calls me the noble name. My mother shortened it and put an “i” at the end. Nicknamed me before I could speak or spell or have a say.

It was no one’s name and now it is mine. Not Alma like my Grandma, because Alma sounded like a farm wife which she was. Not Amanda like my Nana because my cousin already got that name. But Patti, Patti-cake Patti-cake, hamburger Patti.

At least I wasn’t Pat, like a flat hand tapping a knee, like someone spitting. I never knew any girls named Pat, but a Pat would probably be good at sports. And I’m not.

There was one other Patty in my grade. Patty with a “y”. At recess she stood still when everyone else ran around. Wore a powder blue coat with Kleenex in the pockets and if you asked for a Kleenex she’d give you a crumpled one and tell you don’t worry, it’s wrinkled but it’s clean. I’m not that shy. Not like powder blue Patty. I play whatever game everyone else is playing. I try too hard.

Or Peppermint Patty from the Peanuts cartoons who had freckles and a raspy voice. She was spunky and wore sandals and called Charlie Brown Chuck. Me? No freckles, no rasp. No spunk, no sandals. I’m not that original. And not quite a cartoon. Not like Peppermint Patty. I wear the clothes everyone else is wearing. I want to fit in.

No, I wasn’t like any other Patti, but somehow I knew how I was supposed to be. Wholesome and smiley. Bright and twittery, like a parakeet in a pet store. Like my name, I was abbreviated, pre-packaged. A convenience food, a breakfast treat. A bit too eager to please.
Vignette Project Rubric

Name: __________________________
Score: ____ / 65

1. Content and Structure

   ___ / 20

   - at least six vignettes with original content
   - thoughtful arrangement of vignette series
   - identifiable climax and resolution
   - interesting /powerful use of vignettes' opening and closing lines
   - sharply observed experience
   - titles of whole series and of individual vignettes are apt, creative and specific

2. Development of Theme and Motif

   ___ / 20

   - clear unifying theme and motif
   - thoughtful and progressive development of theme
   - identifiable motif appears at least 3 times and supports the theme
   - vignette series deals with the concept of identity

3. Style & Voice

   ____ / 20

   - mimics Sandra Cisneros' voice; informal, immediate; not “essay-ish”
   - carefully crafted “poetic prose”
     - use of sound elements
       ▪ alliteration, repetition, rhyme
     - use of figurative language
       ▪ rich, inventive imagery, similes and metaphors, personification, etc.
   - breaks some, but not all, grammatical conventions
     - run-ons and fragments
     - no quotation marks or semicolons
     - periods, commas, apostrophes, dashes, and proper capitalization ARE included and properly used

4. Cover and Format

   ____ / 5

   - Cover is neat, shows care to detail, reflects subject matter of your vignettes
   - Title and author on cover
   - Typed, double-spaced, new vignette starts on new page
   - Table of Contents included