The House on Mango Street Part Four Comprehension and Analysis

Directions: To help you understand all aspects of the novel, respond to the following questions or statements. Write your responses on a separate piece of paper using complete sentences.

“Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark”

1. What news does Esperanza’s father share with her?

Papa tells Esperanza that his father has died.

2. Contrast Papa’s reaction with Esperanza’s reaction to the news.

Papa cries about his father dying, which is surprising to Esperanza because she has never seen her father cry. However, she also feels responsible because she’ll have to keep her siblings under control during the day, and she feels sad because she is reminded of her father’s eventual death.

3. What are Esperanza’s responsibilities for the day? What will her father have to do?

Esperanza will be responsible for telling her siblings of their grandfather’s death and keeping them quiet and somber during the day. Her father will travel to Mexico and gather with his siblings for a photo at the gravesite.

“Born Bad”

1. Who is Aunt Lupe? What has her life been like?

Aunt Lupe is Esperanza’s mother’s relative, and she was dark and beautiful in her youth. She was married and had at least one child. She was a swimmer with a well-toned body, but now she is stricken with a terrible disease that cripples her and causes her to go blind. Despite this, she looks forward to Esperanza’s visits, enjoys being read to, and listens to Esperanza’s poetry while encouraging her to continue writing.

2. According to Esperanza, who is “born bad”? Why?

Esperanza talks about how she was born bad because she played the mimicking game with Aunt Lupe in mind. Esperanza thinks that might have caused her death.

3. What advice does Aunt Lupe give Esperanza? What do you think it means?

Aunt Lupe tells Esperanza to keep writing because “it will keep you free.” Aunt Lupe might have meant that as long as you can think and write down your own thoughts, you will be able to think for yourself. She might have meant that writing will give you options for your life. Aunt Lupe might have even been thinking about herself, knowing that imagining and writing can keep a person happy, even though she is confined to her second-floor apartment.

“Elenita, Cards, Palm, Water”

1. What is Esperanza hoping to do when she visits Elenita?

Esperanza is hoping to have Elenita consult some tools and determine if Esperanza will ever have the house she dreams of.

2. Why does Esperanza long to watch Bugs Bunny cartoons instead?

Esperanza may want to watch cartoons because she is not comfortable in Elenita’s eclectic apartment, with all the mystical decorations. Esperanza may also want to watch cartoons because she is not as grown up and ready for her future as she
thought she was. On the other hand, maybe she just wants to watch cartoons because she likes the episode Elenita's kids are watching.

Elenita tells Esperanza that she will find a “home in the heart,” but Esperanza is not satisfied. She wants something more specific, and she is very disappointed.

“Geraldo No Last Name”

1. Where do Marin and Geraldo meet? Who is he to Marin?
Marin knows Geraldo from a dance that night. She danced with him, and she was the last person who saw him before he was hit by a car.

2. Why does nobody seem to know Geraldo’s last name?
No one knows Geraldo’s last name because he is not well known in the area. He works at a restaurant, but Marin cannot remember which one, and she does not know where he lives. He does not have any identification in his pockets, maybe because he is living and working in the United States illegally.

3. Which statements from the vignette suggest that Geraldo could have survived the accident?
When the police question Marin, their comments make it seem like his life does not matter because he is “just another wetback.” That is probably why, at the hospital, the surgeon is not called to operate on Geraldo's injuries.

“Edna’s Ruthie”

1. Who are Edna and Ruthie?
Edna is the owner and landlady for the three-story apartment building next door to Esperanza’s house. Ruthie is her adult daughter, who lives with her, although she has a husband and a home elsewhere.

2. What are two things about Ruthie that Esperanza likes?
Esperanza likes that Ruthie likes to play and that she laughs to herself, even when no one else is around. She and Esperanza both enjoy eating candy, and Ruthie can whistle beautifully, not to mention sing and dance. Ruthie also takes joy in the little things around her, like the clouds and moon overhead and library books.

3. What does Esperanza not realize about Ruthie?
Esperanza does not understand that Ruthie is mentally disabled, possibly from a head injury, since she gets headaches when she reads now. She acts nervous and worried in big crowds at the store, makes plans for the future that she never follows through on, and relies on her mother to make decisions for her.

“Earl of Tennessee”

1. Who is Earl? What does he do for a living?
Earl is a single man who lives in the basement of Edna’s apartment. He works nights as a jukebox repairman, a skill he learned when he lived in the South.

2. How does Earl interact with the kids in the neighborhood?
Earl gets upset and yells at the kids when they are loud and he is trying to sleep during the day. However, Earl can be kind when he gives the kids the 45 records that he does not want.

3. What is the gossip about Earl? What do Esperanza and the other neighborhood kids not realize about Earl and his wife?
The gossip about Earl is that he is married, but his wife lives somewhere else. Many of the neighbors say they have seen his wife, but their descriptions do not match, suggesting that he brings many different women to his apartment. Esperanza is still too naïve to realize that Earl is probably dating these women, but does not have long-term relationships with them.

“Sire”

1. Why is Esperanza afraid of Sire?
Esperanza is afraid of Sire because Sire stares at her often, and it makes her self-conscious. She is also excited by his attention, but she does not want him to know.

2. Who is Lois? How does Esperanza feel about her?
Lois is Sire’s girlfriend. Esperanza notices much of Lois’s physical appearance, as if she were comparing herself to Lois, and she feels jealous that Lois and Sire can do things together at night that Esperanza cannot do.

3. How is Esperanza changing in this vignette? Cite two details to support your answer.
Esperanza seems to be growing up and becoming more mature. She says she feels like “everything is waiting to explode” inside of her - as if she cannot wait to experience adulthood. She also asks Sire rhetorical questions about how he holds Lois and how he kisses her.