The House on Mango Street Part Five 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.

“Four Skinny Trees”
1. What are three things Esperanza has in common with the trees?
Esperanza feels that the trees are the only ones who understand her, just as she’s the only one who understands the trees. Both the trees and Esperanza have skinny necks and pointy elbows, and they both belong but don’t belong on Mango Street. They both strive for growth in a place that does not encourage it.

2. Compare the tone of this vignette with the mention of the trees in the first one, “The House on Mango Street.” How have Esperanza’s feelings changed about the trees?
Esperanza dismisses the trees in the first vignette, since she is obviously disappointed about the house on Mango Street and its surroundings. However, in this vignette, although she still admits they are “raggedy excuses” for trees, she also sees their determination and strength. She appears to admire the trees in this vignette.

3. What does Esperanza learn from the trees?
The trees teach Esperanza to keep reaching for what she wants, and they show her it is possible to grow, even in unfavorable situations.

“No Speak English”
1. Why does Mamacita move to Mango Street? How does she adjust to the move?
Mamacita moves to Mango Street against her will because her husband works and saves money to bring her and their son to live there. She does not adjust well because she never leaves the apartment, and she only sits at the window and listens to the Spanish songs that make her homesick. She cries, sighs, and argues with her husband about going back to her home.

2. Which English phrases can Mamacita use? Why are each of these phrases useful for her?
Mamacita knows how to say “he is not here,” “no speak English” and “holy smokes.” If someone comes to her apartment, she can use the first two to end the conversation and avoid learning English or taking care of the home she does not like. She can use “holy smokes” to pretend she is reacting to someone’s long story, since she does not understand English.

3. What breaks Mamacita’s heart? Why?
Mamacita feels like her heart is breaking when her toddler son starts singing along in English to a Pepsi commercial on television. She has resisted adjusting to living in the United States partially by not learning English, and she probably feels like her son will leave her behind if he learns to speak English.

“Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays”
1. Explain the title: who is Rafaela, why does she drink those juices, and why on Tuesdays?
Rafaela is one of Esperanza’s neighbors. She is beautiful, so her husband locks her in the apartment when he goes to play dominos with friends on Tuesday night. So, she throws money down for the kids to buy her coconut or papaya juice while she listens to the music down the street and thinks of dancing in her tropical homeland.

2. What do Rafaela and Mamacita have in common? How are they different?
Rafaela and Mamacita are both prisoners in their home, listening to music and looking out the window. They both have husbands who are controlling, and they both wish they could move back to their old homes. However, Mamacita could leave the apartment if she wanted, but she does not seem to want to talk with anyone. In contrast, Rafaela cannot leave because she is locked in, but she shouts down to the kids in the street, who help her. Another difference is that Mamacita has company in the apartment in the form of her child, but it seems that Rafaela is all alone.
3. What does Rafaela dream of?
Rafaela dreams of joining the people dancing in the bar on the corner, and maybe having a good time by flirting with some of the men before she gets too old. She also dreams of being Rapunzel, so she can climb down her own hair and escape the apartment.

“Sally”

1. Who is Sally and how does Esperanza feel about her?
Sally is a girl at school that the boys like to talk about because she may be promiscuous. Esperanza observes her, but they do not appear to be good friends, and Esperanza notices that she does not have any friends at the moment. If anything, Esperanza envies Sally for her beauty, her experience with boys, and her sense of fashion.

2. What is Sally’s relationship with her father?
Sally’s father controls her. His sisters had some wild times, and he does not want that to happen to Sally, so he expects her to be a good religious girl who dresses modestly, does not dance, and comes right home from school. He will not let Sally go out after school.

3. How does Sally change when she walks home from school?
When Sally walks home from school, she moves faster and becomes more serious. She pulls her skirt down, takes her makeup off, and begins looking down at her feet, thus showing she is modest rather than bold.

4. What does Esperanza think Sally wants? Do you agree? Why?
Esperanza thinks Sally wants her own house full of her own things, where she can be the person she believes she is and not worry about others’ opinions of her. In that nice house, she would only feel comfort and love, which is what Esperanza longs for, too.

“Minerva Writes Poems”

1. What are some things that make Minerva sad?
Minerva is sad because she is a single mother raising two kids, she feels she is unlucky, and she has a terrible relationship with her husband.

2. Describe Minerva’s relationship with her husband.
Minerva’s husband is not loving at all. He leaves her alone with the kids, so she thinks she is a single mom, but sometimes he comes back. She has thrown him and his belongings out of the house and locked him out, but she lets him in if he apologizes. He beats her, and Esperanza sees the bruises.

3. Why does Esperanza feel helpless to assist Minerva?
Esperanza feels helpless to assist Minerva because Minerva does not feel that she can stand up to the man and permanently leave him. Also, Minerva is only a little older than Esperanza, and Esperanza may feel that she is not experienced enough to deal with such an adult situation.

“Bums in the Attic”

1. What does Esperanza’s father do for a living?
Esperanza’s father is a gardener for rich people who live on the hill.

2. What does the family do together on Sundays? Why does Esperanza stop going?
On Sunday, her family goes to the homes he works at to look inside the windows and see the way the rich people live. Esperanza stops going with them because she is uncomfortable with how much it reminds her of the things her family does not have.
3. What does Esperanza hope to do with her home in the future?
Esperanza hopes to have a big house she can live in by herself when she gets older. She will ask bums to come in and live in the attic, so she can show that she remembers the life she came from. She also wants to be able to help them and get them a place to live, since she remembers not feeling like she had a true home.

“Beautiful & Cruel”
1. How does Esperanza characterize herself?
Esperanza believes she is ugly and undesirable, but her mother tells her she will grow to be beautiful.

2. What decision has Esperanza made about her life?
Esperanza has decided, after looking at all the other women, that she will not be tame and give up her life for men. Instead, she will be fierce and fight the expectations people have for women in her neighborhood.

3. What “quiet war” has Esperanza begun? What is the first step in that war for her?
The quiet war she talks about is battling expectations for behavior, especially behavior related to gender. She begins this war by leaving her place at the table messy.

“A Smart Cookie”
1. What kinds of skills does Esperanza’s mother have? What does she dream of doing?
Esperanza’s mother can speak two languages, sing an opera beautifully, fix a television, draw, and do beautiful needlework. She hopes to leave the neighborhood to see a ballet or an opera.

2. What advice does she give Esperanza?
Esperanza’s mother tells her to go to school and study hard, and then she suggests that marrying a man will not solve her problems. Instead, Esperanza’s mother says, you have to do things for yourself. She also warns Esperanza against shame because it kept her from being the best she could be.

3. Why did Esperanza’s mother quit school? Do you think she could go back now? Why?
Esperanza’s mother says she quit school because she was ashamed of the clothes she wore, which were not as nice as the other kids’ clothes. I think she could go back to school now, if she wanted, but she talks as if her chance is gone.