

**Handout for the Workshop**  
***In English My Name Means Hope: Contemporary Latin@ Immigration Fiction for the EFL-Classroom***

**Alvarez, Julia. *Return to Sender*. New York: Yearling, 2009.**

“After his family hires migrant Mexican workers to help save their Vermont farm from foreclosure, eleven-year-old Tyler befriends the oldest daughter, but when he discovers they may not be in the country legally, he realizes that real friendship knows no borders” (copyright page Alvarez).

Selected extract: 58-72; Mari’s letter to the president of the US on her ‘illegal’ status

Suggested topic/activity:

**Letter Writing** (intermediate; grade 9)

Letters play a prominent and recurring role in the book. Mari’s point of view is brought to the reader through letters and letters are also frequent assignments in her class.

Discussion may include:

- Why did Mari write a letter to the president? What was her aim? Do you think she achieved it?
- Why do we not write as many letters nowadays as people did in the past?
- Are there situations in which writing a letter may be better than calling or sending a text message? Think of one and then write a letter on a topic of your choice. Be prepared to explain why you think your content is best delivered in a letter.

Other suggested resources:

- [goldencageproject.org](http://goldencageproject.org)  
The reality behind the fiction: Interviews and photographs of Mexican migrant workers on Vermont dairy farms
- [return-to-sender.juliaalvarez.com](http://return-to-sender.juliaalvarez.com)  
The author’s suggestions for further reading, viewing, and listening on her book
- [teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.wordpress.com](http://teachinglatinamericathroughliterature.wordpress.com)  
‘Vamos a Leer’ [Let’s read] is a resource blog provided by the University of New Mexico for educators teaching literature about Latin America and the US from elementary to high school level

Your notes:

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**Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage, 2009.**

“*The House on Mango Street*” is the remarkable story of Esperanza Cordero. Told in a series of vignettes – sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous – it is the story of a young Latina girl growing up in Chicago, inventing for herself who and what she will become” (cover Cisneros).

Selected extracts: ‘The House on Mango Street’ (3-5); ‘My Name’ (10-11); ‘Those Who Don’t’ (28); ‘Geraldo No Last Name’ (65-66)

Suggested topic/activity:

**Themes and Vignette Writing** (intermediate; grade 10)

Reading comprehension discussion (Trachtenberg):

- ‘The House on Mango Street’: Where did the narrator live before the house on Mango Street? What were her previous homes like?
- ‘My Name’: After whom was Esperanza named? What does her namesake’s story tell you about the status of women in Mexican society?
- ‘Those Who Don’t’: How do outsiders see Esperanza’s neighborhood? How does she feel when she visits other neighborhoods?
- ‘Geraldo No Last Name’: Why does Geraldo have no last name? From the information that Cisneros provides, do you believe his death was inevitable?

Brainstorming of the selected vignettes’ themes:

Home, identity, environment, names, family, stereotypes, immigration, feminism, ghettoization, hopes & dreams, escape, etc.

Write a vignette of your own on at least one of the themes you identified for *The House on Mango Street*. Bear in mind:

A vignette

- is a very short scene without a plot (note for the teacher: ideal for enacting)
- may be a memory, thought, hope, idea, or dream
- focuses on a single moment and lives from the moments’ details

Source:

Trachtenberg, Peter. “The House on Mango Street: Teacher’s Guide.” *Random House for High School Teachers*. Random House, 1994. Web. 19 Nov 2017.

Your notes:

*The House on Mango Street* is freely available online (PDF) \_\_\_\_\_

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**Alvarez, Julia. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. London: Bloomsbury, 2004.**

“Yolanda García is taking a trip to the Dominican Republic to revisit the country where she was born, which her family was forced to flee when she was a child. Previously privileged and wealthy, the family have found it hard adjusting to immigrant life in the Bronx, New York, particularly their old-world father, Papi. As they immerse themselves in American customs, Yolanda and her three sisters rebel against Papi’s traditions and values, each in their own way” (cover Alvarez).

Selected extract: 86-101; Yolanda’s college experience of love and sexuality

Suggested topic/activity:

**Old World vs. New World** (advanced, grade 11-12)

In the extract, Yolanda struggles with the values instilled in her by her family and the values her American college environment upholds:

- Discuss how the portrayed American values conflict with the ‘old country’ values.
- Cite incidents that support the idea that immigrant children, who have roots in two different cultures, often experience difficulties in establishing an identity for themselves.

*How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* has been removed from some US counties’ high school curricula due to complaints on its sexual content. Some parents experience moral concerns about their teenagers being exposed to scenes with sexual content such as the one you just read. Their opponents argue that the sexual content in the novel underlines its feminist and progressive message. Yet again others say that public education must remain independent of any individual’s moral code and that censoring school curricula violates the right of free speech (NCAC Staff).

- In which sense do these positions also reflect ‘old world’ and ‘new world’ values?
- As a class, stage a debate at a high school assembly attended by parents, teachers, and students who want to discuss the removal of *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* from their curriculum. Incorporate all possible positions on the matter.

Source:

NCAC Staff. “Free Speech Groups Oppose Censorship of ‘How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents’ by Julia Alvarez.” *NCAC*. National Coalition Against Censorship, 21 Dec 2007. Web. 19 Nov 2017.

Your notes:

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