

# Decision Education Foundation English Curriculum

## The House on Mango Street

by Sandra Cisneros

### Unit Snapshot

<b><i>Designed For</i></b>	High School Students
<b><i>Essential Questions</i></b>	Can we control the future? Do the decisions we make really matter? How does thought affect action? What makes writing clear?
<b><i>Content and Skill Focus</i></b>	Decision Topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• six elements of decision quality</li><li>• decision fitness</li><li>• declaring decisions leads to more control</li></ul> English Topics <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the importance of language and style in creative writing</li><li>• the connection between sound and sense in literature</li><li>• clarifying writing through the revision process</li></ul>
<b><i>Expected Outcomes</i></b>	Students will be able to <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• define “declaring a decision” and “decision fitness”</li><li>• evaluate the quality of a decision</li><li>• use decisions as a way to understand literary characters</li></ul> Students will produce an additional episode of the novel.
<b><i>Kinds of Assessment</i></b>	Performance Task: Creative Writing Project Decision Quality Assessment
<b><i>Time Required</i></b>	A minimum of four class periods
<b><i>Comments</i></b>	Set in the Hispanic-American ghetto of Chicago, <i>The House on Mango Street</i> is an unusual coming of age story narrated by a young Mexican American girl, Esperanza Cordero. Full of decision situations, the novel provides students with intriguing examples to explore.

(Version 7)

# Overview

**General Description:** This plan, designed for high school students (grades 9 and 10), is intended to be one part of a larger unit on Sandra Cisneros's story, *The House on Mango Street*. An assumption of the plan is that students have read the text at least once. The unit provides students with the opportunity to study character development and motivation through a look at significant decision situations. With minor adjustments teachers can use the material either as an introduction to eight basic lessons in good decision making, or as a review once students have explored the individual topics in greater depth.

**Duration:** Depending on the students' previous exposure to decision skills, this plan will require at least eight class periods.

**Summary and Decision Perspective:** Set in the Hispanic-American ghetto of Chicago, *The House on Mango Street* is an unusual coming of age story narrated by a young Mexican American girl, Esperanza Cordero. The work is unusual because Cisneros presents forty-four poetic vignettes that compose the story of Esperanza's experiences, desires, dreams, and growth; but at the same time, these short episodes can stand alone as slices of life on Mango Street. Esperanza begins the story by stating her intentions to leave her neighborhood for a better life and house, and by the end she realizes she has deep connections to her roots: she will leave but she will do so in order to come back "[f]or the ones who cannot out." Each brief episode reveals Esperanza's keen powers of observation, and without lengthy descriptions, she gives us a lasting impression of life on Mango Street.

As she narrates her experience in the neighborhood, Esperanza refers to many decisions (and non-decisions) that she and the people around her face—most of them having to do with escaping from their surroundings and finding a better life. Through her careful observation of the choices her family, friends, and neighbors make, Esperanza considers a variety of alternatives and ultimately defines the path that suits her best and gives her the hope of a different future.

# *House on Mango Street*

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# 1. Learning Plan

## First Class: Introduction

### Materials

Essential Questions (page 1)  
Performance Task: Creative Writing Project

### Procedures

- At the beginning of the first class, write the following question on the board:

*Do the decisions we make really matter?*

Without any further clarification, ask students what they think about the question. Note the variety of responses. Avoid leading them in any particular direction at this point. Once the discussion gains some momentum, ask students to write a brief response to the question. Ask for a volunteer to read a response. Ask two or three others with different responses to read what they have written. Then ask the group the following questions:

*Why do we have so many different responses to the question?*

*Was it hard to answer? Why?*

### Points to emphasize:

**1. The original question is hard to answer because it is not clear.** For example,

- what kind of decisions are we thinking about (scale can run from choosing a breakfast cereal to exploding a nuclear bomb)?
- to whom does “we” refer (students, teachers, Americans, humans)?
- what do we mean by “matter” (is the context social, economic, spiritual, political, environmental, educational)?

**2. To be clear we need to make distinctions.** In fact, the main focus of education at any level is learning how to make distinctions (examples: language acquisition is learning how to distinguish one letter, sound, word from another; in visual art we distinguish differences in color, style, and medium; in dramatic art we look at different movements, voices, and expressions; history is the exploration of differences in culture; psychology focuses on distinctions in behavior; and so on).

**3. Being clear is not always easy, but it is rewarding.** It is not surprising that we describe subjects in the educational world as *disciplines*. It takes time and hard work in any subject to learn how to make distinctions well. Human beings are curious creatures,

and the practice of defining our world and existence clearly has always fascinated us. If I have a question about health, finances, spirituality, mountain climbing, technology, language, home remodeling, or physical fitness, I go to the expert. And who is an expert? —a person who has learned to make the most clear and exhaustive distinctions in the given field.

**4. This Unit of Study.** Explain to students that the next few classes and assignments will be devoted to practicing their skills at making distinctions in writing and decision making. In particular, they will explore the differences between writing imaginative fiction and expository prose and between weak and strong decision skills. Introduce the **Essential Questions** (see Unit Snapshot, page 1) under consideration and the **Performance Task** (page 26). Tell students that while the class discusses decision topics and the novel, they should be thinking about the content of their creative scenes.

- During the last 5 to 10 minutes of class, ask students to identify what they think are significant decision situations that characters face in *The House on Mango Street*. Write examples on the board, and ask students to begin a list in their notebooks.

## Next Steps

**Homework Assignment:** Students continue identifying decisions in the novel. They should write a list in their notebooks and consider the following questions for each example:

- *What alternatives does the character consider?*
- *What are the uncertainties the character faces?*
- *Do we see outcomes of the decisions in the novel?*

## Second Class: Elements of a Good Decision

### Materials

Background for Teachers:

Decision Topics Defined

Decision Situations in *The House on Mango Street*

Decision Topic Examples in the Novel

Eight Scenes: Overview and Directions for Teachers

Handout 1—Two Scenes: The Trials of Tom Fields and Incident in the Mall

Handout 2—Scenes Three and Four: Anxious Amy and Bye Bye Bowser

### Procedures

- Review homework: discuss what students discovered about decision situations in the novel. On the board list each example as well as responses to the three questions. The goal is for students to discover the decision situations from themselves. However, teachers can use **Background for Teachers** to provide guidance.
- **Use Handout 1** to begin a review of decision topics. See **Eight Scenes: Overview and Directions for Teachers**. The first two scenes provide examples of decision fitness and declaring a decision. (For definitions of the decision topics, see **Background for Teachers: Decision Topics Defined**.)

Guidelines for Class:

1. Give students the first page of the handout. They can work on this exercise individually or in groups.
  2. Discuss responses and use questions from the chart to guide the conversation. End with a definition of decision fitness, preferably student generated.
  3. Handout the second scene (Incident at the Mall) and follow the same directions in number 2 above. End with a definition of declaring a decision. Again, best if it is student generated.
- Give students **Handout 2**, and review homework directions.

### Next Steps

**Homework:** Students complete **Handout 2**.

# Background Information For Teachers: Decision Topics Defined

## 1. Decision Fitness

- Being decision-fit means that I am in good shape to make a decision— that there are no impediments to my making a carefully-considered choice.
- Decision-fitness applies to both my head (the way I am thinking) and my heart (the way I am feeling).
- To be decision fit, I watch out for
  - emotional distress, shock, depression, anger, fatigue
  - peer pressure or intimidation
  - influence of alcohol or drugs

**A Worthwhile Policy:** *If I lack decision fitness, I should postpone the decision or seek help.*

## 2. Declaring Decisions

**Instead of letting circumstances completely control me, I can declare a decision.** Declaring a decision means that I recognize and state to myself that I have various options to choose from in a given situation. **Often, it is possible to take control by recognizing decision opportunities and using my power to choose in a way that gives me the best chance of success.**

Declaring helps me recognize that doing nothing or “going with the flow” can be a decision in itself. The idea that we “declare” our decisions is based on the idea that we create a space for ourselves between a situation and our reaction to that situation. We can use this mental space to consider our values, creatively generate different possibilities for action, and then choose to act in the best way we can.

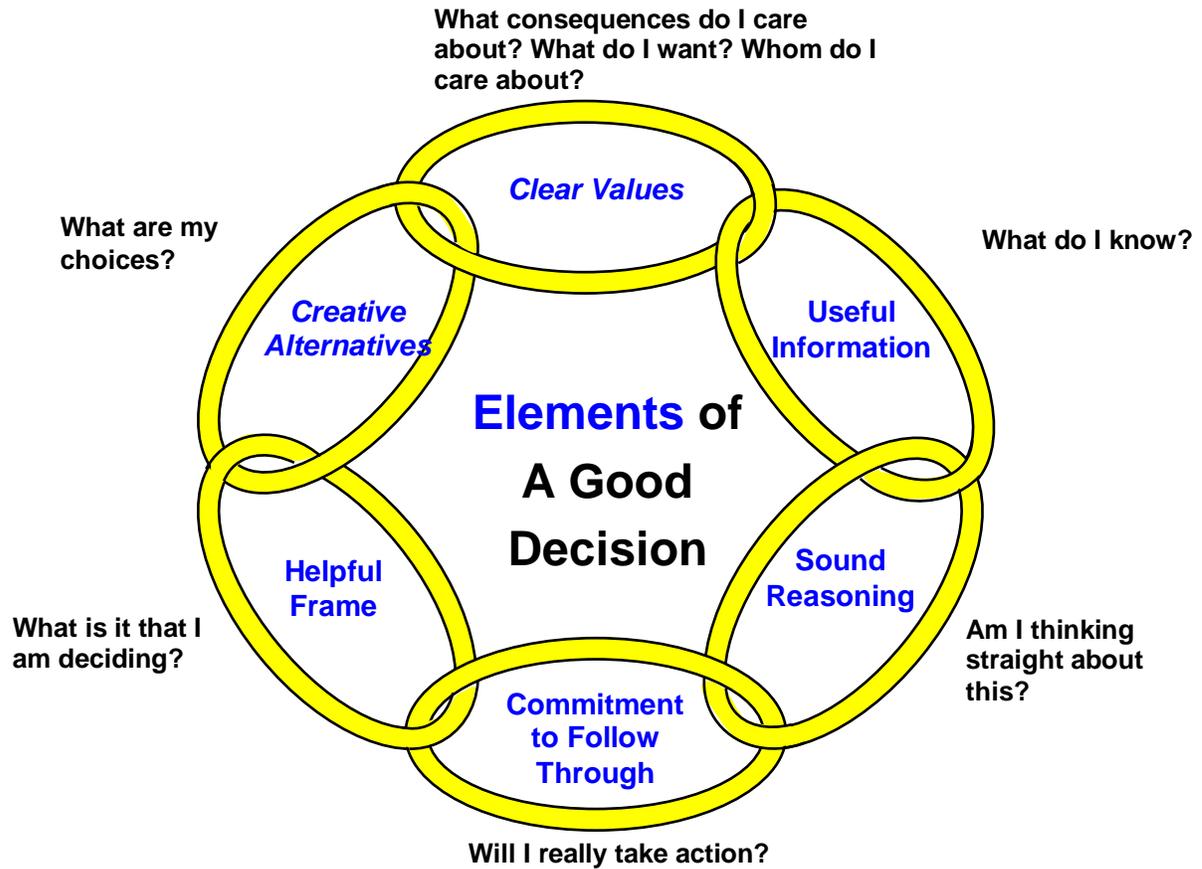
What is a decision and how is it different from a reaction? A decision is a choice made by a person to take one path and not another. **No decision exists if there is only one path available.** Many times, we only see one path as obvious, and thus we “react” to a situation by following the only path we see. A person getting into a fight because someone makes fun of him in a crowd is an example of a common reaction, but it could also be a decision if the person considers other alternatives.

Where do decisions come from? Sometimes decisions are thrust upon us, but we always have the ability and responsibility to declare our own decisions. With practice, we can get beyond our immediate reactions, and take advantage of opportunities to declare decisions. Doing so can improve our chances of getting the things we value in life. How do we recognize these opportunities? While our lives are all unique, situations that call for careful decision-making do have common points. One key factor is recognizing that things we value are at stake. Another is recognizing that it will be difficult or impossible to reverse the outcome once we act (or take no action). In general, we may recognize a break in the normal flow of things, or situations with “high stakes”. **We can create decision opportunities anytime, simply by taking stock of our situation, imagining a better situation, and then taking creative action to “close the gap.” Stop and think before deciding.**

Perhaps our best approach to getting control of our lives is to anticipate decision situations in advance and imagine how we would handle them. Examples include such decisions as whether to drink at a party, whether to drive with someone under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and how to respond to an insult. By thinking things through in advance, we can be prepared to decide quickly and effectively rather than simply react. In fact, by anticipating tough decision situations in advance, we may find ways to avoid them entirely. For example, the decision about how to handle a confrontation may be avoided by taking action in advance to prevent the confrontation from ever happening. We can also gain control by taking actions now to create desirable decision situations. For example, finishing school well can create more options to choose in the future.

### 3. Elements of a Good Decision

Once we are *decision fit* and have *declared a decision*, we use the following *six elements* to help us make the best choice...



***Once we answer all of the questions above carefully and completely, we can rest assured that we have made a good decision.***

## Background for Teachers: Decision Situations in *The House on Mango Street*

- **Esperanza is determined to leave Mango Street.** “I knew I had to have a house. A real house. One I could point to. But this isn’t it. The house on Mango Street isn’t it.” Esperanza makes this decision at an early age. It is one that will change her life. Many of Esperanza’s decisions today are to help her leave Mango Street. Esperanza clearly knows that it is an important decision. She is committed to action. She has put a lot of thought into it. Esperanza seems to be looking at those around her in order to understand their approaches to leaving Mango Street, and to see whether their approaches made sense. For instance, some do it by getting pregnant. Others by going to college. Esperanza seems to prefer the latter.
- **Sally leaves Esperanza by the red clowns at the carnival.** Sally breaks her promise to come back and get Esperanza by the red clowns at the carnival. Some boys attack Esperanza. Sally probably hadn’t thought about the possible consequences of being late. It is not safe for Esperanza to be alone at the carnival. Of course, Esperanza also has decisions to make: she could decide whether she trusts Sally’s word, and whether it makes sense for her to be alone. The girls make decisions that are more important than they realize.
- **Marin is waiting for someone to change her life.** Marin wants out of her current situation. She does not see her “status quo” response as a conscious decision, which is simply to wait for someone else to notice her -- and essentially to “buy” her. To entice men she wears short skirts and makeup and stands outside the house all night. “Marin is...waiting for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life.” She doesn’t apply good decision-making. Her frame doesn’t seem appropriate. She doesn’t seem to realize that she can change her own life. She doesn’t look for better alternatives.
- **Esperanza’s relationship to Mango Street.** Throughout the book Esperanza discusses her relationship to Mango Street. At the beginning of the book it’s about the house, and how she wants to leave. Later, Mango Street represents the people who live there. Alicia tells her, “Like it or not you are from Mango Street and one day you’ll come back too.” Esperanza wants Mango Street to be better, and Alicia explains it’s only the people there who can make it better. Esperanza then sees a duty for her to contribute to her community. Her values expand as her frame shifts from what’s most important to her to what’s important to her and her community.
- **Lucy, Rachel and Esperanza buy a bike.** Lucy and Rachel want to buy a bike, but they only have \$10, and the bike costs \$15. They creatively tell Esperanza that for \$5, they’ll both be Esperanza’s friend, and Esperanza will have a bike every third day. This sounds good to Esperanza, who wants friends. Esperanza only has \$3. She creatively decides to make Nenny an additional owner of the bike by using \$2 of Nenny’s money. (Esperanza however does not let Nenny know in advance.) The three girls purchase the bike. When no one can decide who gets the bike for the first day, they creatively decide to all ride it together on the first day, and then rotate after that.
- **Esperanza packs a rice sandwich.** Esperanza wonders if she wouldn’t rather eat lunch at school in the canteen than at home. She decides to find out which is better, and asks her mom to make her a sandwich and write her a note for the principal to eat lunch at school the next day. Her mother says no because it will be more work. Esperanza thinks of a creative alternative. “I know how to pack my own lunch. If I

ate at school there'd be less dishes to wash. You would see me less and less and like me better...Where is my favorite daughter you would cry, and when I came home finally at three p.m. you would appreciate me." Her creative alternative works. The next day she eats in the canteen. She finds out she likes eating at home better.

- **Sally gets married early to escape.** Sally wants to escape her situation and thinks marriage is the best way. It's also probably the first way she's thought of, and she doesn't take the time to consider other alternatives. Sally meets her future husband at a school bazaar, and married him before knowing much about him, or how he expected marriage to be. Sally has little information to make her decision on. She does marry him, and becomes essentially a slave. Her husband doesn't let her talk on the phone, look out the window, or allow visitors.
- **Louie's cousin steals a car.** Louie's cousin steals the car mainly to go joy riding, and have fun. He doesn't think about the consequences. He doesn't think in advance about the high likelihood he will be caught, or the consequences for being caught. He is not showing clear logic in his decision. Louie is taken off to jail.
- **Esperanza sticks up for her sister at all times.** Esperanza feels it's her job to look after her sister, Nenny, because "she comes right after me." This value affects all her decisions regarding her sister. For instance, if Nenny says something silly in front of others, Esperanza agrees that it's a good point.
- **Esperanza's mother had quit high school.** Esperanza's mother quit high school because she didn't have nice clothes and felt ashamed. But she wishes she had stayed in school. She reminds Esperanza to study hard. Esperanza's mother did not use good decision making. She hadn't thought of other alternatives. Maybe she could have made her clothes, or gotten hand-me-downs from an older friend, or gotten a small job. She didn't think ahead or try to understand what her life would be like without finishing school. She didn't consider her values. She later felt she shouldn't have been ashamed. She didn't consider her frame. What were her goals? And she didn't use logical reasoning.
- **Alicia goes to university.** Alicia decides the best way to change her situation is to go to the university. It was probably a challenge in many ways to go to the university. We presume that no one in her family had gone, and therefore could give her advice or insight. It wasn't even easy to get to the university. Alicia has to take 2 trains and a bus. But Alicia is committed. She thought through in advance what it would take to accomplish her decision to attend university, and sets out to do it.
- **Minerva lets her husband back.** Minerva is not committed to her decision. Her husband is abusive to her, and she kicks him out of the house. But he keeps coming back and apologizing. She accepts his apology, only to be beaten again, and kick him out again.

## Background for Teachers: Decision Topic Examples to the Novel

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Decision Topic</b> <b>Examples from the Novel</b></p> <p style="text-align: right;">→</p>	Importance / Fitness	Declaring a Decision	Helpful Frame	Creative Alternatives	Useful Information	Clear Values	Sound Reasoning	Commitment to Follow Through
Esperanza is determined to leave Mango Street	<b>X</b>							<b>X</b>
Sally leaves Esperanza by the red clowns at the carnival	<b>X</b>							
Marin waits for someone to change her life		<b>X</b>						
Esperanza's relationship to Mango Street			<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>		
Lucy, Rachel and Esperanza buy a bike				<b>X</b>				
Esperanza packs a rice lunch				<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			
Sally gets married early				<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			
Louie's cousin steals a car							<b>X</b>	
Esperanza sticks up for her sister at all times						<b>X</b>		
Esperanza's mother had quit high school								
Alicia goes to university								<b>X</b>
Minerva lets her husband back								<b>X</b>

**Eight Scenes: Overview and Directions for Teachers:** Each scene is intended to illustrate one of the eight decision topics (see table below). **Important Note:** Because many of the scenes illustrate more than one topic, avoid identifying which story illustrates which topic until after groups have had a chance to discuss the situations. Once students have had the chance to share what they have discovered, ask them to comment on their scenes through the lens of the specific topics listed below. See more specific guidelines listed for each class period.

<b>Decision Topic</b>	<b>Scene Title</b>	<b>Discussion Questions</b>
<b>Decision Fitness</b>	<b>The Trials of Tom Fields</b>	<i>What could Tom do to achieve decision fitness in this situation?</i>
<b>Declaring a Decision</b>	<b>Incident in the Mall</b>	<i>What are 2 or 3 moments in this scene when Ted could declare a decision?</i>
<b>Helpful Frame</b>	<b>Anxious Amy</b>	<i>What is Amy’s frame? How can she enlarge it?</i>
<b>Creative Alternatives</b>	<b>Bye-Bye Bowser</b>	<i>What alternatives does Reggie consider? What are other possible alternatives?</i>
<b>Clear Values</b>	<b>The Clark Family Dilemma</b>	<i>Do Clara and Angus have the same values as their daughter?</i>
<b>Useful Information</b>	<b>A New Home for Bowser?</b>	<i>How might additional information help Josh make a better decision?</i>
<b>Sound Reasoning</b>	<b>Bob Won’t Fly</b>	<i>Is Bob using sound reasoning here? Which is safer: driving or flying?</i>
<b>Commitment to Follow Through</b>	<b>Sally Dumped Tad</b>	<i>Did Sally make a decision to dump Tad?</i>

**Notes:**

1. The discussion questions provided above are intended for teacher use to help students focus on the particular decision topics during class discussion of the scenes.
2. Two of the scenes, *Anxious Amy* and *Bye-Bye Bowser*, are related to two later scenes, *The Clark Family Dilemma* and *A new Home for Bowser*. During discussion of the later scenes have students explore how added information influences their views of the situations.
3. As students discuss issues related to risk in *Bob Won’t Fly*, share with them the “Risk Scale” provided in Handout .

## Handout 1. Two Scenes

### **The Trials of Tom Fields**

Tom Fields was having a bad day. His car broke down on the way to work, he had to cover for two sick co-workers, he felt a cold coming on, and while walking home that evening, just as he approached his front door, a sudden downpour drenched him. As he entered the house, he spotted the two full trash bags he had left that morning in the front hall; he had asked his son, Mike, to take them out to the dumpster. As Mike came down the stairs to greet his father, Mr. Fields screamed, “OK, that’s it! You know it’s your job deal with the garbage. I asked you to take these two bags out this morning, and they are still sitting where I left them! You are grounded for a month. Go to your room.”

#### **Directions:**

1. Read the scene carefully. Underline specific phrases or words that interest you or that you think are significant.
2. Consider the following question: What is the central problem in the scene?
3. Use the space below for notes.

## **Incident in the Mall**

One Saturday afternoon Bill, Ted, and Mary were sitting on a bench in the mall, and they were bored.

“What do you want to do?” Ted asked his two friends.

After a few minutes Bill responded excitedly, “I know...follow me,” and he headed for the drug store across the hallway. “We’re going to steal some candy.” When Ted paused, Bill looked at him, yelled, “What are you scared? Don’t be a wimp,” and walked on. Ted glared at Bill and Mary as he followed them into the store.

Standing in the candy aisle watching his two friends pocket Hershey bars, Ted thought to himself, “I don’t think this is a good idea...” At that moment a sales clerk rounded the corner and asked them what they were doing.

### **Directions:**

1. Read the scene carefully. Underline specific phrases or words that interest you or that you think are significant.
2. Consider the following question: What is the central problem in the scene?
3. Use the space below for notes.

## Handout 2

### Anxious Amy

Amy was feeling anxious. She had a plan, and now she had to convince her advisor, Mr. Roberts, that the schedule she designed for the next semester of her ninth grade year was the right one. Amy was determined to be accepted into a top college: she had maintained her A+ average throughout junior high and was “acing” her courses so far in ninth grade; she decided to sign up for three AP courses, to continue singing in the chorus, to volunteer for the community service project, and to try out for varsity swimming. She was anxious because she was imagining Mr. Robert’s reaction: “But Amy, why are you loading so much onto your plate? There isn’t enough time to do all of this well. Think about how packed your days will be—you have two more years to schedule in AP courses, and after another semester, you may have a better idea of what subjects you like best,” and so on. Amy thought to herself, “He just doesn’t understand how hard it is to get into college, and I don’t want to settle for anything but a top tier institution. My closest friends agree with me, and I think my parents do too—they always seem pleased when I do well, and I know they like me to be busy.”

#### Directions:

1. Read the scene carefully. Underline specific phrases or words that interest you or that you think are significant.
2. Consider the following question: What is the central problem in the scene?
3. Use the space below for notes.

## **Bye-Bye Bowser**

Tears began to well up into Maria's eyes as Reggie told her what they had to do. Three weeks ago the young couple rescued a four month old lab puppy named Bowser. Even though Maria and Reggie had never raised a puppy before, they loved animals and were eager to have a dog of their own. They felt a special connection to Bowser from the moment they first met him. Yes, the vet had told them that lab puppies have a great deal of energy and need a lot of attention, especially during the first year or two--and young dogs like to chew things. But three weeks later the couple was exasperated: in that short amount of time, Bowser had ruined two pairs of Reggie's best leather shoes, chewed a large hole in an expensive living room couch, and stolen half a chicken off of the dining room table when their backs were turned. "Maria," Reggie said, "I know we both love Bowser, but we can't go on like this. The dog is ruining our home. We have to give him back to the kennel."

### **Directions:**

1. Read the scene carefully. Underline specific phrases or words that interest you or that you think are significant.
2. Consider the following question: What is the central problem in the scene?
3. Use the space below for notes.

## Third Class: Frame, Alternatives, Values, and Information

### Materials

Handout 3—The Clark Family Dilemma and A New Home for Bowser  
Handout 4—Bob Won't Fly and Sally Dumped Tad

### Procedures

- Break class into small groups to discuss homework scenes. Give groups the following guidelines:
  1. One volunteer reads the scene again—out loud—for the group.
  2. A different member of the group should summarize the main details of the scene, and the rest of the members can clarify with added details.
  3. Once everyone understands the basic facts of the situation, the group can discuss the following questions.
    - a. What is the central problem in the scene? Describe it.
    - b. Do you agree or disagree with the way the main character responds to the situation? Explain.
    - c. With whom do you identify most in your scene? Why?
    - d. If you could give advice to a character in the scene, what advice would you give (and to which character)?
  4. Repeat procedures with second homework scene.
- Regroup for summative class discussion. Give students a chance to share their responses to each scene, one at a time. Conclude each discussion with definitions (student generated, if possible) of helpful frame and creative alternatives. Identify these terms as important elements of a good decision.
- The next scenes:
  1. Give students the first page of **Handout 3**. They can work on this exercise individually or in groups.
  2. Discuss responses and use questions from the chart to guide the conversation. End with definitions of decision fitness, preferably student generated.
  3. Handout the second scene (A New Home for Bowser?) and follow the same directions in number 2 above. End with a definitions of clear values and useful information. Again, best if it is student generated.
- Students can work on the **Performance Task** in class.
- Give students **Handout 4**, and review homework directions.

### Next Steps

**Homework:** Students complete **Handout 4** and continue working on the **Performance Task**.

## Handout 3

### The Clark's Dilemma

Amy's parents, Clara and Angus Clark, were concerned about their daughter's health. She was not physically sick, but she was so busy that they were afraid she would wear herself out. Every day was packed full because Amy took mostly honors courses, sang in the chorus, swam on the junior varsity swim team, and attended PSAT review sessions. Because of Amy's schedule the Clarks were only able to have dinner together as a family two nights a week. When they did see each other, Clara and Angus tried to support their daughter by letting her know how proud they were about her success in school. Amy usually responded by talking about her aspirations to be accepted by a top college or university. Although they had not spoken to Amy about their concerns, the Clarks wondered why she was so focused on college at this point in her high school career. Shouldn't ninth and tenth grade be less pressured and more fun? What was Mr. Roberts, her school advisor, telling Amy, and where was this pressure coming from? Was Amy headed for a breakdown, and were her goals worth it?

#### Directions:

1. Read the scene carefully. Underline specific phrases or words that interest you or that you think are significant.
2. Consider the following question: What is the central problem in the scene?
3. Use the space below for notes.

## **A New Home for Bowser?**

Josh Linnet couldn't get over the eager look in his son's face. He hadn't seen Matt this excited for a long time. Even though the Linnets were somewhat concerned about Matt's recent moodiness, Josh told his wife, Lilly, that it was "just a phase" and that Matt would snap out of it soon. And now, his son stood before him full of energy, intently telling Josh about the opportunity to own a dog: their neighbors, Maria and Reggie Eigler, were thinking about giving up their four month old lab puppy, Bowser. The Linnets had admired the puppy when they saw him in the Eiglers' back yard, and Maria and Reggie had invited Matt over a few times to play with the dog. Today, when Matt learned that the Eiglers were considering giving the puppy back to the kennel, he ran home to beg his father to let him have Bowser. Josh and Lilly were not particularly interested in dogs and had never owned a pet before. But as he looked at his son's happy face, Josh thought to himself, "What the heck—most of the neighbors have dogs, so how hard could it be to raise one? And if owning a pet makes Matt this happy, I will let him have Bowser."

### **Directions:**

1. Read the scene carefully. Underline specific phrases or words that interest you or that you think are significant.
2. Consider the following question: What is the central problem in the scene?
3. Use the space below for notes.

## Handout 4

### Bob Won't Fly

As her brother Bob drove her to the airport, Sophia invited him to visit her during the upcoming Thanksgiving break. Bob told her he did not have enough time because it would be impossible for him to drive from Philadelphia to Denver and back in the space of a long weekend. She suggested that he fly to Denver and even offered to buy him a round trip ticket. Bob thanked her, but said that he had decided never to fly again. When Sophia asked him why he had given up flying, Bob told her that it was too risky.

“The last time I was on a plane, Bob continued, “we hit some strong turbulence, and the aircraft dipped and swerved and shuddered. I realized that there I was in this small container in the sky completely exposed to the elements and that I had no control. I felt helpless. What if the pilot made a mistake or fainted? What if lightening hit the plane? And then I remembered going through airport security, and realized that even if we survived the turbulence, someone might hijack the plane. No more planes for me—I feel much safer driving my car.”

#### Directions:

1. Read the scene carefully. Underline specific phrases or words that interest you or that you think are significant.
2. Consider the following question: What is the central problem in the scene?
3. Use the space below for notes.

## **Sally Dumped Tad**

It is Saturday night, and Claire is puzzled. A week ago her best friend, Sally, decided to break up with Tad. While the news was a shock to most people, Claire knew it was the right move. Even though the couple had been the central focus of the social scene for the past year and a half, a few months ago Sally admitted to Claire that Tad was a bum. A star on the school baseball team, Tad was also an insecure guy who cared more about image than friendship. For example, Sally told Claire that a number of times when they went out together and Tad saw her eating French fries, he would make a joke about her gaining weight—and he would make sure his friends heard so that he got a laugh. He liked to have Sally on his arm as they showed up to a party, but soon after their arrival, Tad would desert her and end the evening in a drunken stupor with his buddies. On Saturday—a week after the breakup—Claire asked Sally if she wanted to go with her to the movies. Sally declined, saying that she was going out to dinner with Tad. “But I thought you dumped him,” Claire exclaimed. Sally responded, “Yes, I broke up with him, but we are still friends. I just want to spend some time with him to see how he is doing.”

### **Directions:**

1. Read the scene carefully. Underline specific phrases or words that interest you or that you think are significant.
2. Consider the following question: What is the central problem in the scene?
3. Use the space below for notes.

## Fourth Class: Reasoning and Commitment to Follow Through

### Materials

Handout 5—Risk Scale

Handout 6—Decision Assessment Table

### Procedure

- Break class into small groups to discuss homework scenes (Bob Won't Fly and Sally Dumped Tad). Give groups the following guidelines:
  1. One volunteer reads the scene again—out loud—for the group.
  2. A different member of the group should summarize the main details of the scene, and the rest of the members can clarify with added details.
  3. Once everyone understands the basic facts of the situation, the group can discuss the following questions.
    - a. What is the central problem in the scene? Describe it.
    - b. Do you agree or disagree with the way the main character responds to the situation? Explain.
    - c. With whom do you identify most in your scene? Why?
    - d. If you could give advice to a character in the scene, what advice would you give (and to which character)?
  4. Repeat procedures with second homework scene.
- Regroup for summative class discussion. Give students a chance to share their responses to each scene, one at a time. Teachers can use **Handout 5—Risk Scale** to discuss Bob's fear of flying. Ask the class how this information influences the frame and alternatives of the decision. Conclude each discussion with definitions (student generated, if possible) of reasoning and commitment to follow through. Identify these terms as important elements of a good decision.
- Give students copies of **Handout 6** and have them begin the **Decision Quality Assessment** in class. Guidelines:
  - Step 1:** Give each student (or group of students) the name of one of the characters in the story who faces a significant decision situation (see list in **Background for Teachers: Decision Situations in *The House on Mango Street***).
  - Step 2:** Now that the class has reviewed all of the decision topics, they can analyze the quality of their characters' decisions by filling in **Handout 6: Decision Assessment Table**. After class discussion of the eight scenes, students might find it helpful to have copies the decision chain and the definitions of decision fitness and declaring a decision.

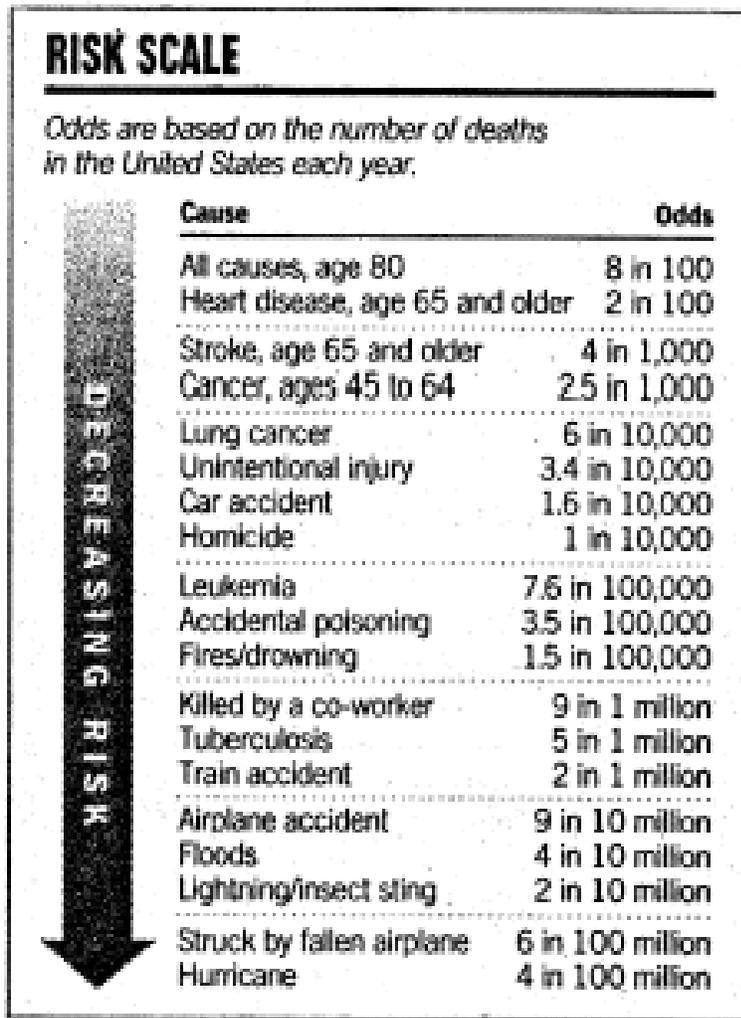
**Step 3:** Allow students time to share and discuss what they have discovered with the others who have worked on the same decision. Then each group should report out during a whole-class discussion.

**Step 4:** Finally (and for homework, if more time is needed), have students write a message (1-3 paragraphs) to their characters. In this message, students should give their characters advice on how they might improve their decision skills and better attack the problems they face.

### Next Steps

- Complete **Step 4** of the **Decision Quality Assessment**.
- **Final Assignment: Creative Writing Project** (see **Performance Task** directions on page 26). To give students enough time to think and write well, this exercise will take a total combination of at least four class periods and homework assignments. How teachers divide up class and homework time will depend on the structure and schedule of individual programs.

## Handout 5. Risk Scale



Chronicle Graphic

## Handout 6. Decision Assessment Table

<p><i>Write the name your character and describe as clearly as possible the decision situation that character faces.</i></p> <p><b>Character's Name:</b></p>
<p><b>Decision Description:</b></p>

	<p><i>In the space below comment on how thoroughly the character considers each element listed in the left column. Then in the column at the right, give the character percentage grade that reflects your assessment.</i></p>	
<b>Importance and Fitness</b>		
<b>Declaring a Decision</b>		
<b>Helpful Frame</b>		
<b>Clear Values</b>		
<b>Creative Alternatives</b>		
<b>Useful Information</b>		
<b>Sound Reasoning</b>		
<b>Commitment to Follow Through</b>		
<b>Importance and Fitness</b>		

## 2. Assessment Evidence

### Performance Task: Creative Writing Project

**Overview:** This exercise is intended to give students the opportunity to exercise their creative writing skills while demonstrating and sharpening their knowledge of basic elements that comprise good decision making.

**Directions for Students:** Your task is to write an additional episode of *The House on Mango Street*. Here are the steps to complete this assignment:

1. **Gather Your Thoughts.** As you read the story, identify the following:
  - a. the episode (or two) that you find most interesting
  - b. two or three characters that intrigue you
  - c. a particular incident that catches your attention

Write the examples (and page references) in your notebook with brief explanations of why you chose each one. The class will break into small groups, and you will have the opportunity to share, discuss, and clarify your responses.

2. **Make Your Plan.** Using your notes and the information you gathered from your group discussion, decide which of the following paths you will take:
  - create a vignette in which one of Cisneros's characters (one of particular interest to you) makes an important decision
  - introduce a new character into the story, and include an important decision that character makes.

3. **Write Your Episode.** Keep the following two goals in mind:
  - a. **imitate** as closely as possible Cisneros's narration, language, and style while keeping the content consistent with hers (For example, Esperanza remains on Mango street throughout the story; therefore, it would be inconsistent to have her hop a plane to Disney World).
  - b. **describe** as clearly as possible the particular decision situation your character faces.

4. **Listen to Your Editors.** Professional writers receive comments and suggestions from their editors and must consider that advice as they revise their work. In this class, small groups will serve as editorial staff: each person in the group reads his/her episode (a few times, if necessary), and receives feedback from the rest of the members.

5. **Revise and Rewrite.** Using the advice you find valuable from your editorial board, make necessary changes and write a new draft of your episode.

## 2. Assessment Evidence (continued)

### Decision Quality Assessment

**Step 1:** Give each student (or group of students) the name of one of the characters in the story who faces a significant decision situation (see list in **Background for Teachers: Decision Situations in *The House on Mango Street***).

**Step 2:** Once the class has reviewed all of the decision topics, they can analyze the quality of their characters' decisions by filling in **Handout 6: Decision Assessment Table**. After class discussion of the eight scenes, students might find it helpful to have copies the decision chain and the definitions of decision fitness and declaring a decision.

**Step 3:** Allow students time to share and discuss what they have discovered with the others who have worked on the same decision. Then each group should report out during a whole-class discussion.

**Step 4:** Finally (and for homework, if more time is needed), have students write a message (1-3 paragraphs) to their characters. In this message, students should give their characters advice on how they might improve their decision skills and better attack the problems they face.

### 3. Resources on the Web

-- **Random House Academic Resources:**

<http://www.randomhouse.com/acmart/teacherguides/houmantg.html>

Background and other notes for teachers. Includes study questions.

--**Sandra Cisneros: Teacher Resource File:**

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramsevil/cisneros.htm>

Biography, unit lesson plans, and book review links.