SUMMER ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

1. Read Sandra Cisneros’ short essay titled “Only Daughter.” Copies may be found at rbrhs.org.
2. Write a ½ - 1 page response for each essay.
3. Write a one - two page memoir.

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING

1. Size 12 Times New Roman Font
2. One inch margins
3. Create TWO Docs for this assignment. Doc One: Response + Doc Two: Memoir

ASSIGNMENT #1 - Response to the Essay

1. Develop a ½-1 page response.
2. The reader response should contain the following:
   a. A brief summary of the essay in your own words.
   b. A detailed description of your opinion of the essay that cites specific portions of the text.
   c. An explanation of the author’s message to his or her audience.
3. Please incorporate the three items above into a well-written response for EACH ESSAY.

ASSIGNMENT #2 - Writing a Memoir

After reading the Cisneros essay and writing down your response, craft a one - two page personal essay of your own. You do not have to divulge your deepest, darkest secrets. But you should write about a meaningful experience from one particular spot in time. You may use this writing as a springboard for writing your College Essay, the first writing assignment of your senior year, so give it a concerted effort.

Suggestions for Writing: If you feel like this task is beyond you, try to address one of the following writing prompts.

1. Write about your favorite food. This may sound juvenile, but think about the experiences we have with food, family, friends, etc. Writing about that soft-serve ice cream cone that fell on the hot pavement the summer you turned five might be a worthwhile endeavor.
2. Look out a window and find something that reminds you of your elementary school years.
3. Ask your parents or guardians about THEIR fondest memories involving you. Then write about that from your perspective.
4. Think of an influential person in your life and discuss that person’s impact on your life.
5. Stole a base? Got an A? Found Waldo? Write about an event that made you proud of yourself.

A Note About Technology

If you use Google Drive/Google Docs, you may access your work nearly anywhere using Google Apps.

If you do not have access to a computer, if your WiFi is down, or if you spend your summer vacation in Antarctica to escape the heat, email your teacher to find a solution. Wait, email won’t work in these scenarios. Try this: Visit the school Monday-Thursday, visit your local library, go to a public place with free WiFi, or handwrite your assignments and type them up when school starts.
When Sandra Cisneros was accepted to the Iowa Writers' Workshop, a famous writing program at the University of Iowa, she was thrilled. Once she got there, though, she felt out of place. All of the other students, it seems, came from wealthy families. She recalls, “My classmates were from the best schools in the country.” Cisneros felt alone. She sensed that the other students wouldn’t understand what it was like to grow up poor.

She felt even worse the day they studied an author who compared people's houses to their souls. Cisneros grew up in crowded houses in poor neighborhoods in Chicago. It upset her to think that her family's ugly houses were pictures of her soul.

It wasn't long after this, however, that she began to appreciate what set her apart from the other students. In her writing, she started to reveal her background, the people she knew, and the places where she had grown up. In 1984 she published The House on Mango Street, which captured life in inner-city Chicago neighborhoods. The book has been hugely successful.

Cisneros may have had a difficult start at the workshop in Iowa, but she learned the most important lesson for a writer: Write what is true to your heart and your soul.

myNGconnect.com

See Sandra Cisneros's Web site.
Learn more about The House on Mango Street.
Only Daughter
by Sandra Cisneros
Once, several years ago, when I was just starting out my writing career, I was asked to write my own contributor's note for an anthology I was part of. I wrote: "I am the only daughter in a family of six sons. That explains everything."

Well, I've thought about that ever since, and yes, it explains a lot to me, but for the reader's sake I should have written: "I am the only daughter in a Mexican family of six sons." Or even: "I am the only daughter of a Mexican father and a Mexican-American mother." Or: "I am the only daughter of a working-class family of nine." All of these had everything to do with who I am today.

I was/am the only daughter and only a daughter. Being an only daughter in a family of six sons forced me by circumstance to spend a lot of time by myself because my brothers felt it beneath them to play with a girl in public. But that aloneness, that loneliness, was good for a would-be writer—it allowed me time to think and think, to imagine, to read and prepare myself.

Sandra Cisneros was born in Chicago in 1954. She has two older brothers and four younger brothers.
Being only a daughter for my father meant my destiny would lead me to become someone's wife. That's what he believed. But when I was in fifth grade and shared my plans for college with him, I was sure he understood. I remember my father saying, "Que bueno, mi'ja, that's good." That meant a lot to me, especially since my brothers thought the idea hilarious. What I didn't realize was that my father thought college was good for girls—for finding a husband. After four years in college and two more in graduate school, and still no husband, my father shakes his head even now and says I wasted all that education.

In retrospect, I'm lucky my father believed daughters were meant for husbands. It meant it didn't matter if I majored in something silly like English. After all, I'd find a nice professional eventually, right? This allowed me the liberty to putter about embroidering my little poems and stories without my father interrupting with so much as a "What's that you're writing?"

But the truth is, I wanted him to interrupt. I wanted my father to understand what it was I was scribbling, to introduce me as "My only daughter, the writer." Not as "This is my only daughter. She teaches." El maestra—teacher. Not even profesora.

In a sense, everything I have ever written has been for him, to win his approval even though I know my father can't read English words, even though my father's only reading includes the brown-ink Esto sports magazines from Mexico City and the bloody ¡Alarma!

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**Key Vocabulary**

- **destiny** n., what is supposed to happen to you in the future; fate
- **approval** n., accepting something as good or correct; a good opinion of something

**In Other Words**

- **Que bueno, mi'ja** That's good, my daughter (in Spanish)
- **hilarious** very funny
- **In retrospect** Looking back
- **professional** educated man with a good job
- **profesora** professor (in Spanish)
magazines that feature yet another sighting of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* on a tortilla or a wife's revenge on her philandering husband by bashing his skull in with a *molcajete* (a kitchen mortar made of volcanic rock). Or the *fotonovelas*, the little picture paperbacks with tragedy and trauma erupting from the characters’ mouths in bubbles.

My father represents, then, the public majority. A public who is disinterested in reading, and yet one whom I am writing about and for, and privately trying to *woo*.

When we were growing up in Chicago, we moved a lot because of my father. He *suffered periodic bouts of nostalgia*. Then we’d have to let go our flat, store the furniture with mother’s relatives, load the station wagon with baggage and bologna sandwiches, and head south. To Mexico City.

We came back, of course. To yet another Chicago flat, another Chicago neighborhood, another Catholic school. Each time, my father would seek out the parish priest in order to get a tuition break, and complain or *boast*:

“I have seven sons.”

He meant *siete hijos*, seven children, but he translated it as “sons.” *I have seven sons.* To anyone who would listen. The Sears Roebuck employee who sold us the washing machine.

In Other Words

*La Virgen de Guadalupe* a religious figure

*woo* attract

*suffered periodic bouts of nostalgia* sometimes missed his old home

*boast* brag, speak proudly

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Cultural Background

*Fotonovelas* are popular graphic novels written in Spanish. Topics include crime, cowboys, romance, and the lives of famous people.
short-order cook where my father ate his ham-and-eggs breakfasts.
"I have seven sons." As if he deserved a medal from the state.

My papa. He didn't mean anything by that mistranslation, I'm sure.
But somehow I could feel myself being erased. I'd tug my father's
sleeve and whisper: "Not seven sons. Six! And one daughter."
Will Cisneros’s father ever see her for who she really is?

When my oldest brother graduated from medical school, he fulfilled my father’s dream that we study hard and use this—our heads, instead of this—our hands. Even now my father’s hands are thick and yellow, stubbed by a history of hammer and nails and twine and coils and springs. “Use this,” my father said, tapping his head, “and not this,” showing us those hands. He always looked tired when he said it.

Cisneros’s success as a writer allowed her to fulfill her dream of owning her own home. She lives in San Antonio, Texas.
Wasn't college an **investment**? And hadn't I spent all those years in college? And if I didn't marry, what was it all for? Why would anyone go to college and then choose to be poor? Especially someone who had always been poor.

Last year, after ten years of writing professionally, the **financial rewards** started to trickle in. My second National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship. A guest professorship at the University of California, Berkeley. My book, which sold to a major New York publishing house.

At Christmas, I flew home to Chicago. The house was **throb**ing, same as always: hot **tamales** and sweet **tamales** hissing in my mother's pressure cooker, and everybody—my mother, six brothers, wives, babies, aunts, cousins—talking too loud and at the same time, like in a Fellini film, because that's just how we are.

I went upstairs to my father's room. One of my stories had just been translated into Spanish and published in an anthology of Chicano writing, and I wanted to show it to him. Ever since he recovered from a stroke two years ago, my father likes to spend his leisure hours horizontally. And that's how I found him, watching a Pedro Infante movie on **Galavision** and eating rice pudding.

There was a glass filled with milk on the bedside table. There were several vials of pills and balled Kleenex. And on the floor, one black sock and a plastic urinal that I didn't want to look at but looked at anyway. Pedro Infante was about to burst into song, and my father was laughing.
I'm not sure if it was because my story was translated into Spanish, or because it was published in Mexico, or perhaps because the story dealt with Tepeyac, the colonia my father was raised in, but at any rate, my father punched the mute button on his remote control and read my story.

I sat on the bed next to my father and waited. He read it very slowly. As if he were reading each line over and over. He laughed at all the right places and read lines he liked out loud. He pointed and asked questions: “Is this So-and-so?” “Yes,” I said. He kept reading.

When he was finally finished, after what seemed like hours, my father looked up and asked: “Where can we get more copies of this for the relatives?”

Of all the wonderful things that happened to me last year, that was the most wonderful.