A Voice of My Own: Defining Epistemic Injustice in *The House on Mango Street*

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Abstract

A Voice of My Own focuses on the key skills of reading analysis, code breaking, and reading for purpose. Students will read Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street* while exploring key themes of epistemic injustice, ultimately writing their own stories of experiences with epistemic injustice. Students will write creatively and reflectively using journals, read collaboratively, and engage in daily discussions attempting to validate students as knowers.

Keywords

Social justice, literacy, *The House on Mango Street*, women empowerment, immigrant experience, creative writing, collaborative reading, injustice, knowledge, philosophy, ignorance, society, culture, gender, ethnicity, social class, writing project, book study, language arts

Content Objectives

I teach English and Social Studies at a magnet school in Olney for some of the city's most ambitious young women. The school is composed of a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds ranging from regions like Southeast Asia, the Caribbean Islands, the Middle East, and of course Philadelphia Pennsylvania. While we are fortunate to have a diligent student body who consistently performs at or above state standards, it would be a vast oversight to claim that our students don't face their own unique set of barriers on their path to success. Specifically, being an all girls school which caters to students of all economic and ethnic backgrounds, students consistently express that their identities as women of color, women born into poverty, etc. place them in a marginalized position which has confidence wavering impacts.

This troubles me to see so many capable young women, from such an early age, identify that they are so experienced with being at best *considered* and at worst outright *ignored*. There are too many young women passing through the halls who feel the weight of epistemic injustice, yet cannot put a name to it and thus lose their ability to share some of their most essential experiences. It seems clear that a unit using literature to name and identify epistemic injustice would be a valuable experience for the young women at my school who are so focused on breaking the glass ceilings society has placed them under.

Standards: This unit is aligned with the Pennsylvania Department of Education Academic Standards for English and Language Arts. These standards are designed to support instruction and development of content knowledge related to reading, writing, speaking, and a host of other domains. The goal of this unit is to expand upon PDE standards for English and Language Arts by making historical and contemporary connections.

Standard - CC.1.3.9-10.A
Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

Standard - CC.1.3.9-10.H
Analyze how an author draws on and transforms themes, topics, character types, and/or other text elements from source material in a specific work.

Standard - CC.1.4.9-10.D
Organize ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text; include formatting when useful to aiding comprehension; provide a concluding statement or section.

CC.1.4.9–10.E Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of composition. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms of the discipline in which they are writing.

The following resources were used in researching this unit:

- McKinnon, R. (2016) Epistemic Injustice. Philosophy Compass, 11: 437– 446.
- Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice.* Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Vintage, 1991.
- Grasswick, Heidi, "Feminist Social Epistemology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
- Skarlicki, Daniel P. “The Relationship Between Being Perceived as Trustworthy by Coworkers and Individual Performance†.” *Journal of management.* 35.1 (2009): 136–157.
- Billingham, C.M. and Kimelberg, S.M. (2018), Identifying the Urban: Resident Perceptions of Community Character and Local Institutions in Eight Metropolitan Areas. City & Community, 17: 858-882.

Objectives
This unit is designed for a 9th grade English course, however it could also be applicable to any middle school or high school Language Arts based class depending on student reading levels and educational needs. There are no prerequisites to this unit, however students should ideally have a basic level of familiarity with text discussion. This unit is

designed for a 45 minute daily period schedule, but can be revised for an alternate schedule as needed.

The objectives for this unit include the following:

- Define epistemic injustice
- Analyze the mechanisms of epistemic injustice in society
- Employ a critical lens to view epistemic injustice as it appears in *The House on Mango Street*
- Synthesize a vignette which showcases an instance of epistemic injustice
- Analyze methods for creating equity within a community

Background

Epistemic Injustice

"Her power is her own. She will not give it away." The House on Mango Street, page 89

Epistemic injustice, on its face, is an overarching term used to described a "wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower."[1] Philosopher Miranda Fricker's work on the subject of epistemic injustice is incredibly illuminating, and she notes that while epistemic injustice can take on many forms in our day to day lives. It primarily takes the form of testimonial injustice or hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice refers to when prejudice causes a listener to give less credibility to a speaker's word due to the speaker's identity or background. For example, consider the rolling eyes of so many Americans when, god forbid, a non tax-paying adult voices concerns about the political realm. Hermeneutical injustice is much more pervasive, difficult to see, and equally difficult to diagnose. It refers to when "collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences."[2] Hermeneutical injustice often occurs long before its effects can be seen and is far more likely to affect minority populations. Look no further than the lack of resources, facilities, and programs for Philadelphia's teens today as an example of the real world consequences of hermeneutical injustice. Philosopher Heidi Grasswick advances Fricker's ideas by adding the concept of epistemologies of ignorance as a pervasive mechanism which enables epistemic injustice in society.[3] In order to better understand these what these concepts are, how they creep into the lives of our students, and how we can shed light on the within the classroom, a deeper discussion of each individual part is necessary.

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[1] Fricker, Miranda. Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 1.

[2] Fricker, Miranda. Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 1.

[3] Grasswick, Heidi, "Feminist Social Epistemology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition).

Testimonial Injustice

"*I don't know who decides who deserved to go bad.*" *The House on Mango Street page 59*

Testimonial injustice is a form of epistemic injustice which "occurs when a speaker is given less credibility than deserved (suffering a credibility deficit) because of an identity prejudice held by the hearer."[4] In order to fully understand the concept of testimonial injustice, one needs to consider how communication is inherently social, and that anything social will adhere to some existing power structure in society. As noted by Fricker power can be used actively or passively, but in any case where one person in a group uses their power (knowingly or not) to silence or cheapen the experience of another group member, we are looking at a form of testimonial injustice.[5] Typically, testimonial injustice occurs when someone attempts to create a credibility deficit in someone else.

Perhaps the best place to look for an example of testimonial injustice is the legal system, where those involved in any given case literally provide testimony in order to determine its outcome. In the recent trial of Derek Chauvin, a police officer in Minnesota responsible for the death of George Floyd, we can find a multitude of examples for testimonial injustice at work in the testimony of Donald Williams. Williams was a bystander to the event who can be seen in video arguing and pleading with police to ease up on their treatment of Floyd and eventually asking that they check his pulse. During testimony the lawyers for Chauvin consistently tried to use Williams position in society, a black man arguing with authority figures, as a way to convince the jury that he is not to be taken at face value and is an inherently biased witness to the event. Williams himself recognizes this and states, "No, you can't paint me out as angry — I would say I was in a position where I had to be controlled. Controlled professionalism, I wasn't angry"[6] But the intent is clear: the lawyer uses the power of his position to undermine the experience of Williams— Williams himself disarming this attempt makes it no less real. Of course this is only one of many examples of testimonial injustice. We can also see it in the countless trials for sexual assault where victims experiences are dismissed based on their behavior after the fact, what they were wearing, or whether or not they have the capacity to remember the events in question properly.

Additionally, testimonial injustice can be used to amplify voices that may be otherwise undeserving. In the example of Donald Williams above, not only is Mr. Williams having his own credibility checked, the lawyer for Dereck Chauvin harnesses his position as a lawyer, someone obviously educated and well collected, as a means for being seen as an authority on the facts. Regardless of accuracy, it will always be hard for a jury not to treat the words and opinions of lawyers just a little bit more seriously than the words of witnesses.

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[4] Grasswick, Heidi, "Feminist Social Epistemology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2018 Edition), 31.

[5] Fricker, Miranda. Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 9.

[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCKq9-c0cHs

Considering that testimonial injustice often creates a perception that the testifier has a credibility deficit, it is important to assess the impact that being seen as credible has on students. It's worth noting that in this context, the term "credibility" more or less equates with trustworthiness. With this in mind there is ample research to give an idea about the negative consequences of students feeling that they are not viewed as trustworthy. One such study was conducted by Kurt T. Dirks and Daniel P. Skarlicki.[7] In it they attempt to determine how perceived trustworthiness impacts individual performance in the workplace. Unsurprisingly they concluded that when employees feel that they have the trust of their peers and superiors, their performance level increases and they report and overall higher degree of happiness with their work. If we apply this to the classroom (which in America is often likened to preparation for the "real world" of employment) we can see that it is vital for students to feel that they are credible and trusted, and that their feelings are valid.

It's doubtful that any teacher would disagree that testimonial injustice— or any epistemic injustice— has no place in the classroom, but what about all the spaces our students dwell that we as teachers cannot control? It seems clear that in order to truly shield students from the effects of testimonial injustice, we need to teach them how to recognize it and how to disarm it. After all, "The virtue of testimonial justice involves an agent's reflexive critical social awareness."[8] We must teach our students how to first recognize societal power, understand when it's being abused, and take steps to remedy that abuse.

Hermeneutical Injustice

"*Only how come I felt angry inside? Like something wasn't right.*" *The House on Mango Street page 97*

Hermeneutical injustice is perhaps the most insidious type of epistemic injustice, and one of the most likely forms for teenagers to face. Hermeneutical injustice, "occurs when there exists a lack of collective interpretative resources required for a group to understand (and express) significant aspects of their social experience."[9] Essentially, hermeneutical injustice refers to any time someone does not have the capacity (for any reason) to understand that they are the victims of an epistemic injustice. Fricker offers what is probably the best example: women who have dealt with sexual harassment during a time when that harassment was not widely understood to be what it is, sexual harassment.

The problem that hermeneutical injustice poses in the classroom stems from the fact that it gives those who have a privileged place in society an automatic status as a knower. For young students of a minority background, the problem is twofold. Not only

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[7] Skarlicki, Daniel P. "The Relationship Between Being Perceived as Trustworthy by Coworkers and Individual Performance†." *Journal of management.* 35.1 (2009): 136–157.

[8] Grasswick, Heidi, "Feminist Social Epistemology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition), 32.

[9] Grasswick, Heidi, "Feminist Social Epistemology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition), 33.

do young people lack many of the reference points needed to explain their experienced, students from minority communities often find that there is a lack of media which will aid their understanding of their experiences. As Grasswick points out, is students cannot adequately express their experiences, or if they aren't given the capacity to reflect on their experiences in a way that will be seen as valid, they are potential victims for epistemic exploitation.[10] The United States History classroom is a great place to see this at work. In the Philadelphia School District, students are taught African American history before they enter the US History classroom. This is done in an effort to give students the capacity to view US History— so often a celebratory story of the "Great American Experiment"— with a little more criticism. Without the context for the African American experience in America, it is all too easy to paint America with an altruistic brush that really isn't accurate.

Epistemologies of Ignorance

"*Those who don't know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we're dangerous.*" *The House on Mango Street page 28*

The root of all epistemic injustice may well be ignorance, but Grasswick's research makes it evident that there is a need to revisit the way we conceptualize ignorance. Often thought to be a simple lack of awareness— easily fixable by some metaphoric filling of the blank— ignorance can be the result of an active effort to skew power relations in any social group. Grasswick succinctly states that, "the production of ignorance needs to be understood as a substantive practice itself."[11]

Students from inner city backgrounds feel the heavy weight of constructed ignorance. In the aftermath of redlining and white flight, it is no secret that being from Philadelphia is seen as a deficiency to those on the outside looking in. Research conducted by C.M. Billingham and S.M. Kimelberg shows that the geographical descriptor "urban" is closely associated with failing neighborhood institutions by white and hispanic respondents. They state that, "the understanding of place … varies by race. Even when they inhabit similar parts of their respective metropolitan regions, black, Hispanic, and white Americans have different experiences and report different community identities." While this is not wholly unsurprising, the question of why remains. Grasswick provides a potential answer to this, noting that constructed ignorance is often used as a force to facilitate or permit social domination.[12] This social domination is the exact reason why so many in society see being from the inner city as an inherent deficit: by lowering the perception of "urban" areas, the perception of non urban areas is raised relatively.

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[10] Grasswick, Heidi, "Feminist Social Epistemology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition), 34.

[11] Billingham, C.M. and Kimelberg, S.M. (2018), Identifying the Urban: Resident Perceptions of Community Character and Local Institutions in Eight Metropolitan Areas. City & Community, 17: 875.

[12] Grasswick, Heidi, "Feminist Social Epistemology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition).

The good thing about epistemic ignorance is that it can be undone. The implications of this are certainly positive for us teachers, and it seems clear that undoing epistemic ignorance is one of our most fundamental tasks in the limited time we have with our students.

Taking all of this into account, it is clear that students from all backgrounds can benefit from learning about ignorance as a constructed concept rather than a naturally occurring one. Otherwise, real epistemic justice is impossible.

Epistemic Injustice in The House on Mango Street

"Shame is a bad thing, you know? It keeps you down." The House on Mango Street page 91

While I'm not aware of any existing resource that lists "epistemic injustice" as a theme of Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, anyone who has studied the text and read up on epistemic injustice can see how the two are connected. There are numerous examples of epistemic injustice within the novel which offer entry points for discussion and exploration. Esperanzas position as a young woman of color in an impoverished neighborhood means that her story is rife with testimonial injustice. Additionally, Cisneros highlights the experiences of minorities within American cities at large and those who have limited social power within their communities. For these reasons, there is an ample amount of text focusing on identities that are often unseen and unheard. While epistemic injustice is a large topic and runs deep throughout the text, this discussion will be focused on examples in the text of testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, and epistemic ignorance. This discussion will not be exhaustive, but is meant to give teachers an idea about how certain sections of the text might be approached within the classroom.

Throughout the novel, Cisneros draws significant attention to the identities of its characters. Specifically, Cisneros highlights the experiences of minorities within American cities at large and those who have limited social power within their communities. For this reason, there is an ample amount of text focusing on identities that are often unseen and unheard. "Boys & Girls" serves as an introduction to this testimonial injustice, here Esperanza introduces us to her neighborhood and household where, "the boys and girls live in separate worlds."[13] Later on, her encounters with the older Marin teach her that, as a young woman living in an impoverished neighborhood, her options are slim. Esperanza notes how, because Marin is a pretty girl from Puerto Rico, all she can do is, "[wait] for a car to stop, a star to fall, someone to change her life."[14] We see chapters that don't focus on Esperanza like "No Speak English," the story of a woman who is socially condemned by everything she cannot say.[15] The chapters to center the theme of testimonial injustice include: *Boys & Girls, Marin; A Rice Sandwich; Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark; Elenita, Cards, Palm, Water; Edna's Ruthie; Four Skinny*

[13] Cisneros, Sandra. The House On Mango Street. 1st hardcover ed. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1994, 8.
[14] Cisneros, Sandra. The House On Mango Street. 1st hardcover ed. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1994, 27.
[15] Cisneros, Sandra. The House On Mango Street. 1st hardcover ed. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1994, 78.

Trees; No Speak English; Beautiful & Cruel; A Smart Cookie; The Monkey Garden; Linoleum Roses; Alicia & I Talking on Edna's Steps.

The text also uses Esperanza's experiences as a window into hermeneutical injustice. Whether attempting to explain the origins of her poverty or noting the strange ways men look at her as she walks the neighborhood— Esperanza's story is dripping with moments that she *knows* are significant, but cannot express why. Perhaps the best examples of this theme are the scenes dealing with Esperanza's friend Sally and the eventual assault that Esperanza lives through. Her relationship with Sally, an older girl from the neighborhood, exposes Esperanza to themes of sexuality, heartbreak, abuse, and entrapment long before she herself is of age to understand the way these factors shape Sally's life. In "Red Clowns" Esperanza is sexually assaulted at a fair by an older boy. What begins as a relatively clear and straightforward narrative of a day at the fair quickly devolves into something muddled, unclear, and obfuscated. In fact, Esperanza never even states exactly what happens between her and the older boy, how could she when she herself does not understand it? But she understands enough about her experiences throughout the book to feel the robbery of innocence they culminate in. The chapters to center the theme of hermeneutical injustice include: *Those Who Don't; The Family of Little Feet; A Rice Sandwich; Hips; Chanclas; Sire; Sally; What Sally Said; The Monkey Garden; Red Clowns.*

Epistemic ignorance also appears as a major theme. From the characters who live there, to Mango Street itself, we see a world shaped by ignorance. It is clear that, as a poor hispanic neighborhood, Mango Street and its inhabitants are looked down upon by the surrounding city. We see Esperanza comment on the way that outsiders to Mango Street, "think we're dangerous."[16] She notes the ways her teachers treat her first as a non native speaker and second as a student. Esperanza herself experiences epistemic ignorance as she sees an older neighbor get arrested for riding around in a stolen car. The chapters to center the theme of epistemic ignorance include: *My Name; Louie, His Cousin & His Other Cousin; Those Who Don't; Geraldo No Last Name; A Smart Cookie.*

Teaching Strategies

In this unit students will be required to engage in critical thinking, critical reading, written analysis, and academic group discussions in order to explore the theme of epistemic injustice as it appears in *The House on Mango Street* as well as in their own lives. Students will be guided in their reading of the text and provided scaffolded instruction, but as the unit proceeds independent critical analysis and discussion will be emphasized. In order to achieve this a number of instructional strategies will be employed. See the text below for a list of strategies, many of which have materials attached in Appendix A:

Academic Vocabulary

In order to properly implement this unit, it is essential to establish an academic vocabulary for students to use when analyzing *The House on Mango Street*. The concepts described at length above that relate to epistemic injustice are complex and for us to reasonably expect students to employ these concepts in their analysis, they should be

[16] Cisneros, Sandra. The House On Mango Street. 1st hardcover ed. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1994, 28.

taught and discussed directly. Establishing this vocabulary will not only help students engage more deeply with the themes of *The House on Mango Street* but will also allow them to expand on the experiences they live every day, with the ultimate goal being a unification of themes from the text and lived experiences. An academic vocabulary should be established early in the unit in order to maximize the themes of the unit.

Critical Reading Bookmark

Critical reading bookmarks are simple but effective tools for guiding students' reading with minimal interactions or interruptions. Essentially, students are given a bookmark with specific reading tasks to complete for each chapter, section, etc. The content of a critical reading bookmark can take many forms, it is unlikely that a critical reading bookmark for a history text will contain identical tasks to say, that of a science text, but this is one of the advantages: we can subtly encourage students to use specific strategies for specific types of text. A critical reading book mark that can be used for *The House on Mango Street* is attached in Appendix A.

Collaborative Close Reading

Throughout the unit, students will be reading *The House on Mango Street* and analyzing its themes, however *The House on Mango Street* has a very unique structure and style which can be treated as prose poetry. The poetic nature of the text makes it particularly useful to use the strategy of collaborative close reason in order to examine it. Collaborative close reading is a technique for reading poetry as a group. Students meet as a group in a comfortable setting where they can see and hear one another with minimal distractions. Students read a section of text individually, using the critical reading bookmark as a guide. After this period of independent reading, the teacher will read the text (partially or fully) aloud. Students will then be assigned specific sections of the text (words, sentences, paragraphs etc.) that they will be responsible for commenting on. After taking some time to gather thoughts, the teacher will lead students through a discussion, asking each student to contribute their ideas to create a larger whole. By the end of the discussion, students will ideally come to some level of agreement on the main ideas and themes of the text. This process should start out relatively structured, but as the unit progresses it is encouraged to allow students to take the reins.

Reflective journaling

Throughout the unit, students will keep a daily journal in class in order to connect the themes and events in the books with their own experiences. The journal serves as a mechanism for students to share their experiences in a more private and intimate way than in class discussions and provides an opportunity for differentiation.

Student Led Instruction

The unit will begin with structured teacher led lessons, but one of the main goals of the unit is to encourage students to see themselves as competent and valid knowers. With this in mind, lessons should become less structures and more student guided as students become more comfortable expressing their experiences and perspectives. The final sections of the main text will ideally be student guided collaborative close reads, as

by that point students will be well versed in the process and expectations of a collaborative close read.

Exit ticket
Students will complete small writing/discussion tasks prior to completing a lesson. The purpose of these tasks is to check for students' understanding and allow for teacher reflection. If necessary, these exit tickets may be factored in as grades.

Vignette Collection
As a culminating project for the unit, students will create their own vignettes in the style of *The House on Mango Street*. Students will employ creative writing in order highlight and explore a moment or period of their life where they experienced a form of epistemic injustice. Similarly to *The House on Mango Street* students will be encouraged to use figurative language to express the way epistemic injustice *feels* and the detriments it can have. The guiding idea here being that epistemic *justice* can only come about when people are versed in naming and disputing moments of epistemic *injustice*. This project will require students to utilize the analysis skills that they have practiced throughout their reading using the critical reading bookmark, collaborative close reads, and reflective journaling.

Classroom Activities

Lesson One: Defining Epistemic Injustice

Objectives: Students will define and explain forms of epistemic injustice in order to form a consensus on what testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, and epistemic ignorance look like in practice. Students will be grouped together to research and share findings.

Materials and resources:
- Epistemic Injustice Vocabulary Guide (Fig. 1 Appendix A)
- Epistemic Injustice Mini Presentation Overview (Fig. 2 Appendix A)
- Computer stations (individual laptops suffice)

Phase One: Begin class with an entry activity focused on a time where students felt that they were wronged as a *knower*. Something along the lines of "write five lines about a time when you felt someone didn't take you seriously or listen to your opinion. Why do you think you weren't taken seriously? What would it take for that person to change their mind?" would suffice nicely. After giving students some time to write, ask students to share out their experiences. Keep a running list of student responses on the board, and ask students to chime in if they've had a similar experience to a classmate (if so, add a checkmark next to the initial experience). The goal here is to facilitate a discussion about the frustration that occurs when we as people experience epistemic injustice. Allow students to discuss freely, ideally they will form a natural dialogue about shared experiences. After you are satisfied with the discussion, inform students that they will be

beginning a new unit focusing on a new text where the experiences they've just discussed will pop up as a key theme.

Phase Two: However you see fit, divide the class into three groups of five to seven students (six groups depending on class size). Once you've divided students into groups you are satisfied with, assign each group with one of the academic vocabulary terms listed above. Once each group has been assigned their term, pass out the Epistemic Injustice Vocabulary Guide and the Epistemic Injustice Mini Presentation assignment guide. Review the guide with students to clarify any questions or concerns. Once everything is clear to students, allow them to work for the time you allot. (The presentation can be scaled up or down depending on how much depth you're looking for out of students).

Phase Three: Allow students time to work in their groups. As students are working move throughout the room to check in with each group and clear up any confusion. Check in with each group that they have members working on each of the assigned rolls in order to complete the assignment fully. Continuously give students updates on the time they have remaining.

Phase Four: (This phase may end up needing to take place during another class depending on the depth you're looking to achieve with each presentation) Call students back together as groups. Have each group present their topic, allowing students time to ask clarifying questions after each presentation wraps up. Once all presentations are complete, close class with an exit ticket referencing back to the experience they wrote about for the entry activity.

Lesson Two: Welcome to Mango Street

Objective: Students will make predictions and begin reading *The House on Mango Street* in order to write reflective responses. The goal is to introduce students to the novel and the structure of its text.

Materials and resources:
- *The House on Mango Street* physical or digital copies for all students
- Journals for students (can be provided by teacher or student, can be digital or physical)
- Critical Reading Bookmark (Fig. 3 Appendix A)

Phase One: Begin the lesson by projecting the cover of *The House on Mango Street* onto the board (printing out copies works too if you don't have projector access). Pair the image with an entry activity that engages students in using the cover to make a prediction about the text. Something along the lines of "Based on the cover (image, color, text, etc.) what could you expect this novel to be about? Make at least two claims." Allow students to come up to look closer at the image as well as engage in dialogue about it. Once students have recorded their responses, ask for them to share and keep a list

of their thoughts on the board. The goal here is to fill up the board as much as possible with predictions so that they can be circled back to later.

Phase Two: Distribute copies of *The House on Mango Street* in the method that your school/department specifies. Next explain the concept of the Critical Reading Bookmark and hand one to each student. Remind students that the bookmark will be used to guide their journal entries and that occasionally they will record formal responses to the guiding questions on their bookmark. Students can also be prompted to take out their journals (or you can distribute them at this time). Once every student has the required materials, give a brief explanation of the structure of *The House on Mango Street*. Inform students that, while it is a novel, it has very short chapters that function as a mix between storytelling and poetry. For most of their reading students will work collaboratively to analyze the chapters together for the majority of their time with the text, but in order to get themselves familiarized with the text they will begin by reading the first two chapters independently.

Phase Three: Inform students that they will be reading the chapters *The House on Mango Street* and *Hairs*. Encourage students to consider the guiding questions on their Critical Reading Bookmark as they will be writing a short journal entry on the first two chapters as an exit ticket. Using whatever methods you prefer to engage students with independent reading, give students some time and space to complete the first two chapters. Considering the length, this should not take too much time, but use discretion for how much to set aside. Give students a warning a few minutes before the time comes to close and let them know you will be circling back to the entry activity (still being displayed on the board).

Phase Four: Once students have completed their independent reading, begin the discussion phase of the lesson. Ask students to take a moment to reflect on the predictions they made at the start of class. Begin a discussion about which of their predictions have been confirmed, which of them have proven to be off base, and which ones we don't know enough to say about yet. During the discussion attempt to gauge students comfort with the style of the text as this is valuable information in determining when and how to begin the transition to collaborative close reads. Once the discussion begins to come to a close, move into the exit ticket portion of class.

Phase Five: Ask students to take out their journal and write a brief (half a page to one page) entry on their thoughts about the first two chapters. On the board, display a prompt along the lines of "What is Mango Street like? Who makes up the family of our narrator and what are they like?" and remind students that they can use their Critical Reading Bookmark as well for inspiration on what to write about.

Lesson Three: Collaborative Close Reading

*This lesson will be repeated several times during the unit and will serve as the main lesson for discussing new chapters. It can be done quickly or slowly, and pace is entirely up to the individual teacher, however it is highly recommended to start things

slowly to ensure that students are comfortable with the process. **This lesson specifically assumes you are about half way through the text of the novel**.

Objectives: Students will participate in collaborative close reading groups in order to analyze chapters from *The House on Mango Street .* Students will practice analyzing texts as well as explaining their understanding.

Materials and resources:

- Writing instruments for students
- *The House on Mango Street* physical or digital copies for all students
- Collaborative Close Reading reflection worksheet (Fig. 4 Appendix A)
- Journals for students

Phase One: Begin the lesson with an entry activity to activate prior knowledge and jog students' memory. Something akin to "list three things that stuck out to you from the last reading" or "during our last collaborative close reading session, what were our discussions focused on?" As long as time permits, allow students to share their responses to get a discussion flowing. (Discussions leading into collaborative close reads are not required but they do set a strong tone for the rest of the lesson)

Phase Two: If your room is not set up in a way that allows all students to see one another with an unobstructed view take a moment to rearrange it. Have students sit in desks and clear everything off except for their novel and a pencil. If you don't have full confidence in your students' ability to participate in free flowing discussion, consider creating a few guided questions for the days section of the text.

Phase Three: Inform students that they will be participating in a collaborative close reading session. Have all students turn to the same chapter of *The House on Mango Street*. Prior to beginning the reading, assign individual paragraphs, sentences, and words to students around the room. Inform them that after the reading phase they will be responsible for explaining their interpretation of their assigned piece of text. Have students read over their assigned section of the text for a minute or two before reading the full text. Once students are more familiarized with their portion of the text begin reading. It is recommended that students read aloud paragraph for paragraph so that they can fully explore the poetic structure of the text. After students have completed their reading of the text, have them take a moment to think about what their assigned portion of the text does for the chapter as a whole. While students collect their thoughts, reread the chapter out loud to them (or the most key parts of the chapter if time does not permit).

Phase Four: After students have collected their thoughts, go around the room (chronologically as sections appear in text) and ask students to share out their interpretation of the assigned text. Encourage other students to chime in and add their own thoughts, also encourage students to build on the analysis of students who have already spoken. The goal is to build a free flowing and self referential discussion reflecting on possible

interpretations of meaning in each chapter, building piece by piece rather than explaining everything all at once. Students should have control of the discussion, taking it where they see fit, but remind and encourage students to consider the different forms of epistemic injustice and how they appear in the text. The more practice students have with the process, the more beneficial their discussions will be.

Phase Five: Once time in class begins to run low, inform students that the day will be wrapping up. Before leaving, as an exit ticket, students should write one piece of feedback about an insightful comment they heard in the discussion.

Lesson Four: Vignette Workshop

Objective: Students will begin synthesizing vignettes in the style of *The House on Mango Street* in order to demonstrate understanding of epistemic injustice through writing. The goal is to allow students to think about their ideas and work them out on paper before making any final decisions about their vignettes.

Materials and resources:

- Vignette Project Assignment Overview (Fig. 5 Appendix A)
- Laptops or writing work stations for students
- Epistemic Injustice Vocabulary Guide (Fig. 1 Appendix A)

Phase One: As students enter the classroom, hand each of them a copy of the Vignette Project Assignment Overview. Once all students have a copy and are seated, go over the assignment and clarify any questions students may have. Be sure to highlight that this project will be focusing on writing about their own experiences with epistemic injustice in the style of *The House on Mango Street*. If students need to review the forms of epistemic justice in order to get their ideas solidified, have a few copies of the Epistemic Injustice Vocabulary handout from lesson one.

*The goal of this lesson is to workshop some ideas to get students writing, if you have a preferred method within your classroom, feel free to stick to it. What follows is merely a description of what the workshop *could* look like.

Phase Two: Inform students that the first phase of the workshop will be about brainstorming. Let them know that they will be spending about ten minutes with a partner discussing instances of epistemic injustice that appear in the novel which were relatable. Students should finish with a list of four or five chapters from the novel that they felt were most relatable. Once students understand their task, pair them off and give them time to work (If you'd prefer, students can also select their own groups). As students brainstorm, be sure to circulate the room to provide guidance when needed.

Phase Three: Once ten minutes of brainstorm time has elapsed, inform students that they will shift into another group in order to explore how the chapters they selected are relevant to life experience. Either dictate new pairs to students or have one group of

partners “shift” one person clockwise. Once students have new groups, they should explain their choices to their partner by explaining either how the chapters mirror their own experiences or what they thought was important about those chapters (students who may not be as open with their personal experiences are encouraged to do that latter). Allow students about ten to fifteen minutes for this discussion.

Phase Four: Students can move back to their respective desks at this point. For the remainder of class, students can start getting their ideas down as drafts. Remind students that they will not have a chance to finish today, so they don’t necessarily have to commit to any of their ideas quite yet. While students are writing, circle the room and check in with students to see what experiences they are considering focusing on for their vignettes. Give students a warning as class is expiring that it’s time to wrap up for the day but they will have more time to work in the future.

Lesson Five: Vignette Celebration

Objective: Students will present their writing in order to reflect on shared experiences between peers and the novel. The goal is to allow students to share and celebrate their writing in order to validate students as knowers.

Materials and resources:

- Peer Presentation Review Form (Fig. 6 Appendix A)
- (Optional) Published class wide Vignette Collection

Phase One: Once students have entered the room, remind them that this class will be all about them sharing their work and celebrating one another as knowers. Allow students to take a moment to get the vignette they plan to present ready. As students are readying themselves, take a moment to go over presentation expectations and explain the peer presentation review form. Review forms will be passed out after each presentation, and when each presentation ends students will give their reviews to the presenter.

Phase Two: Once students are ready, and the directions are understood, presentations can begin. There is a number of options for how to go about presentations, students could be grouped by theme etc, but this is up to the individual teacher. Go around the room and give each student a chance to read their vignette to the class. After the have read their vignette, they should open up the floor for a few questions about their piece and the drafting process. Rinse and repeat this process until all students have shared.

Optional Phase Three: It is recommended that prior to this lesson, you collect and review all of the final submissions. So long as the submissions meet your standards, use a spiral binder to create an anthology of vignettes from the class. Essentially this means each class will “write” their own version of *The House on Mango Street* by the end of the unit. If you choose to publish the student work, the time to show it to students is after presentations. The goal of publishing the vignettes and presenting the published copy to students is to honor their capacity as knowers and the experiences they’ve been brave enough to share. Remind students that validating people as knowers is an important step in the process of bringing epistemic justice to our world.

Resources

Fricker, Miranda. *Epistemic Injustice.* Oxford University Press, 2007.
In this book, Fricker puts forth the idea of "epistemic injustice." She lays a foundation for understanding the various ways that knowers are stripped of their credibility in order to dismiss the knowledge they possess. This book was one of the primary inspirations for the unit.

McKinnon, R. (2016) Epistemic Injustice. Philosophy Compass, 11: 437– 446.
McKinnon further analyzes the topic of epistemic injustice and offers examples of how it is displayed in our world. The article served as further inspiration for using epistemic injustice as a guiding theme for *The House on Mango Street*.

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Vintage, 1991.
The novel that will anchor the unit. Cisneros creates an urban neighborhood where the power structures of the home, the neighborhood, and the city are explored. Additionally the novel dives into concepts of race, gender, social class, and ethnicity by exploring how people are judged first and foremost on these factors.

Grasswick, Heidi, "Feminist Social Epistemology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)
In her article, Grasswick looks into how feminism is tied into epistemic injustice. She details the ways that women in particular are victims of epistemic injustice in American culture and explores ways that epistemic justice can be restored.

Skarlicki, Daniel P. "The Relationship Between Being Perceived as Trustworthy by Coworkers and Individual Performance†." *Journal of management.* 35.1 (2009): 136–157.
Skarlicki documents the effects that "being seen as trustworthy" affects the morale and quality of work within work environments. While not directly equated to students in schools, the rationale *can* be applied to schools. Skarlicki finds that, when people are empowered as being capable and trust worthy, they are likely to be happier and more productive at their tasks.

Billingham, C.M. and Kimelberg, S.M. (2018), Identifying the Urban: Resident Perceptions of Community Character and Local Institutions in Eight Metropolitan Areas. City & Community, 17: 858-882.
This article discusses the way that parents and students within urban and suburban neighborhoods view one another as well as their own communities. The article indirectly makes the case that epistemic ignorance is a longstanding social construct which has ramification on institutions.

Appendix A
Fig. 1

Epistemic Vocabulary Overview

Directions: Below is a brief description of some key terms for our next unit, carefully read and review the definition of each term.

Epistemic Injustice- The idea that people can be unfairly discriminated against in their capacity as knowers based on prejudices about a speaker, such as gender, social background, ethnicity, race, sexuality, tone of voice, accent, and so on. Epistemic injustice appears in many forms including:

1. Testimonial Injustice- When someone is given less credibility (than others) due to a perceived deficit in their knowledge. This could be based on a persons identity, experience, etc. Testimonial injustice is bidirectional, meaning there are instances where someone is given *more* credibility due to an assumption about their knowledge, identity, experience, etc.

2. Hermeneutical Injustice- When there is a lack of resources/experience within a person or group to enable understanding of significant aspects of their social experiences. Hermeneutical injustice occurs when there is not (yet) a group awareness of/ability to identify an injustice that is occurring. It is something that can often only be seen in hindsight.

3. Epistemic Ignorance- Ignorance which is not the result of a “benign gap” in understanding but rather, is constructed and put into action by societal forces. The construction of epistemic ignorance is an active (though subtle) process which is used to enable social hierarchies or social domination.

Fig. 2

Epistemic Vocabulary: Mini Presentation

Purpose: To define and describe different forms of epistemic injustice. The overview you provide will be the lens that we view epistemic justice through for the unit, so be sure to be as clear and direct with your presentation as possible. Your task is to break down your assigned term into its individual parts, it's a good idea to consider: can the term be simplified or explained in a different way?, what does this form of epistemic injustice look like in practice?, who is primarily effected/who benefits?, what can be done to address this form of epistemic injustice?

Date: This will be a small presentation (only a few minutes) so we will complete it within today's class.

Requirements: Though much of this presentation is up to you and your group, there are several things that must be included in order to satisfy the assignment:

- **3-5 minute presentation**
- **3-5 slides to accompany presentation (the questions above would all make good slides!)**
- **Slides must include 2 images related to the presentation (how they relate is up to you!)**
- **All group members must actively participate**

That's it! Now let's get to it.

Fig. 3
Critical reading bookmark (4 copies to save printer paper)

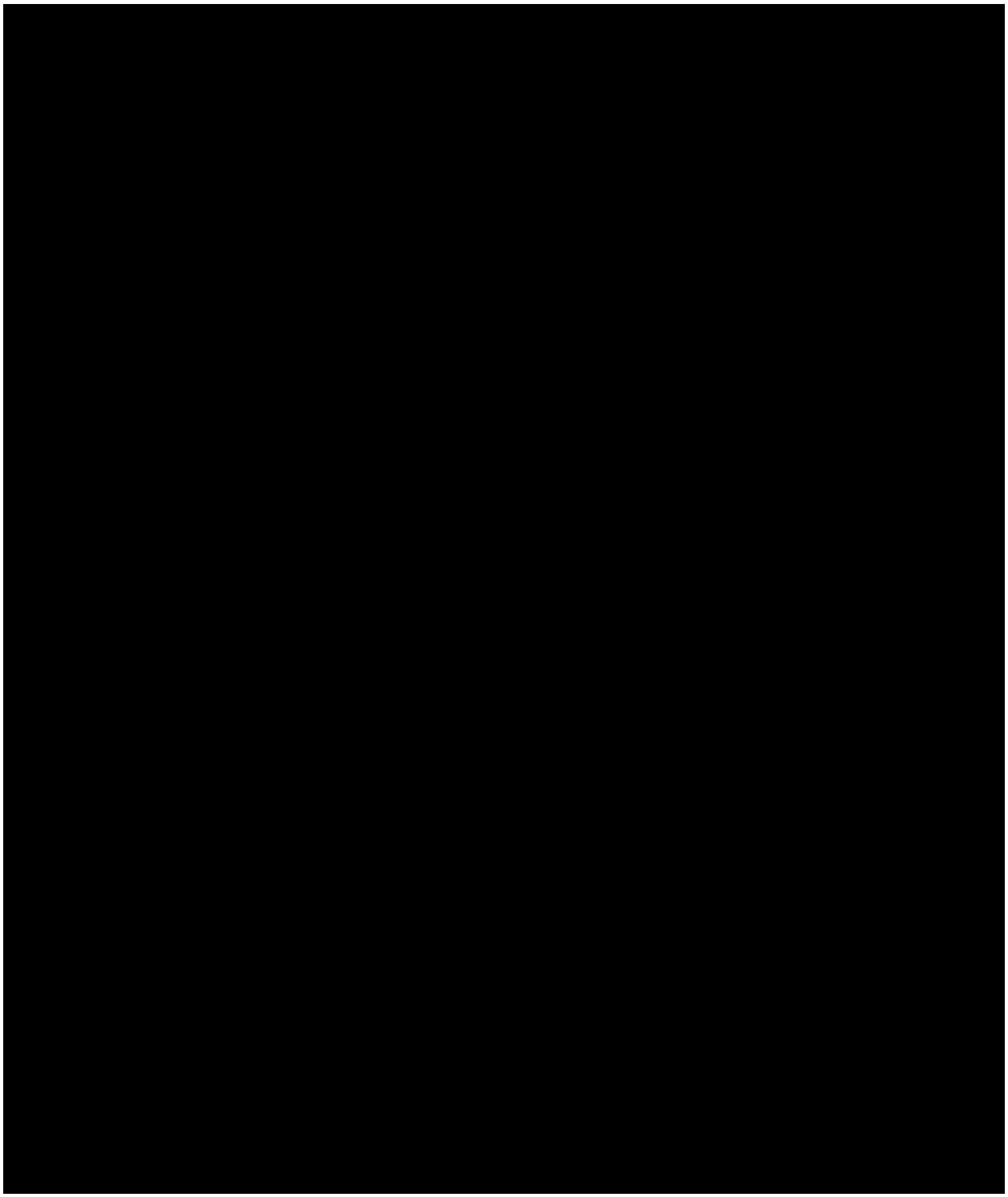

Fig. 4

Collaborative Close Reading Worksheet

Directions: While participating in collaborative close reading with classmates, use this worksheet to keep track of your ideas, questions, and important points from discussion.

Copy down the section of the text you are responsible for here:

1. In your own words, what do you think is the **meaning** of your part of the text? In other words, what is it saying? **Why do you think the author used these specific words**?

2. How do you think your section of the text fits into the text **as a whole**? How does it fit in with what the entire text is saying?

3. What **questions** does this chapter of the novel raise?

4. What comments from your peers either confirm or refute your ideas? What comments from your peers about the chapter stood out to you most and why?

Fig 5.
Vignette Project Overview

Overview: The House on Mango Street is organized into a collection of short memories and scenes, called vignettes. Throughout these vignettes, Esperanza experiences and describes instances of epistemic injustice in her world. For this assignment, consider the following: how and when has epistemic injustice impacted you?

After you have read The House on Mango Street, follow the directions provided below to create your own collection of vignettes.

Directions: Write two vignettes about a time when you have dealt with a form of epistemic injustice. Be sure to model your vignettes in a similar style to *The House on Mango* Street. We will be brainstorming ideas and drafting our vignettes in class.

Assignment Requirements:

- You must have TWO typed vignettes with substantive paragraphs. Vignettes should not exceed more than two pages.

- Each vignette must convey an instance of epistemic justice you've dealt with **OR** an instance where epistemic justice was done

- Each vignette should have a title.

- Each new vignette should start on a new page.

- Each vignette must have at least one example of figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification for example—look these up if you cannot remember what they are).

- Each vignette must use descriptive language to give the reader a sense of place.

- Vignettes should **NOT** follow standard conventions of essay writing, this is an opportunity to write creatively and experiment with storytelling.

Fig 6.

Peer presentation review form. It is recommended that you add several of these grids to one sheet of paper and cut them down in order to save materials.