

**Teacher's note:** An additional assignment I gave to students this year (in place of the Autobiographical Incident Essay) was to write the stories behind three of their chapter titles in Cisneros' style. Like The House on Mango Street, the stories were supposed to connect in some way, be it thematically, a common symbol or issue, etc. Though I did not include this assignment in my lesson plan, some of the students did such an outstanding job on this task I wanted to include their work.

### **Student Sample #1: Creative Pieces**

#### **Hey Kid?**

Me and Robiel grew up together, my older cousin by two years. "Yeah, he my cousin" I would say when people asked, on account he couldn't speak for himself. It didn't matter because I knew what he was trying to say. We didn't need words. Kids would be outside playing. Some would look and stare, others would pay no mind. I would just push my cousin in his wheelchair and skate on my skates. Me and him had our own fun. "Hey, kid, that's yo' brother?" some kid would ask. "No, he my cousin." I would reply. Robiel and I have always been like brother and sister, though, together all the time. Me and the cousin I grew up with, against the world.

#### **Grandma, Why?**

Every year the same thing. One dress after another, whether you like it or not, the same routine: "Thank you, grandma." Christmas of 1997, everyone at my

grandparent's house to collect their presents. I knew it was coming, a dress fit for an old person. Here we go, my turn. I opened the box with the big pink flower on it and pulled out the dress with the soggy green look that made you want to turn your head. "Ewww," I remember thinking to myself, but the word formed into "Thank you." I mean this was my grandmother who went out of her way to buy me the ugliest dress in the store, but who can hate her? "Go try it on," she would say. "Grandma, why?" I would think. I'd stand there in the mirror with the guacamole colored dress on looking like I was going to audition for a star role in the circus. "Grandma, why?" I would play it over and over in my head: Why, why, why? To think I'd have to walk in the outside world looking like an overgrown frog. Oh well, I guess I might as well wear it a few times. Years pass, the same thing each year. A new dress until '99 when my grandma died. Now I say, "Grandma, why? Why won't you come back home?"

### **My Doll Don't Need No Comb**

I can remember as a child not liking African dolls. The White one's were always better. Me and my cousin Megan would sit in the living room of my Auntie's house and play with our dolls. Every time would be the same question: "Why you playin' with that doll?" and I would answer, "Because my doll don't need no comb." They make the African dolls with nappy hair that broke your comb when

you tried to comb their hair, but not my white doll with hair so silky like the princesses you see in the storybooks. Hair so neat, it didn't need a comb. My mom and sister tell me stories of how they would buy me white and black dolls and when they proceeded to give me the dolls, I would run away from the African doll as if she had suddenly become human and reached for me. But I would run to my white doll like I found comfort, to see she was an ordinary doll.

Being the age that I am now hasn't really changed anything. I still will play with a white doll before I'll play with an African doll. Only now I will consider playing with both. Because I choose to play with a white doll doesn't change who I am. I am proud to be me. Still, I always find myself answering the same question "Why you playin' with that doll?" with the same simple answer: "Because my doll don't need no comb."

## **Student Sample #2: Creative Pieces**

### **The Time I Was So Sick**

I was hot like the steam that rises when water boils, so sick that nothing came out of my mouth when I talked. My whole body was burning. I wanted to jump into water that was freezing cold. I felt like a house that is caught on fire.

Being sick is like my worst enemy. I couldn't fight it. It was hurting me. I thought it was going to last forever. It seemed like a car stopping at a stoplight and the light never turning green for you to go. Until so much later.

It didn't stop until I awoke the next day, feeling like Sleeping Beauty when the prince kissed her.

### **Lost Money**

I was a little girl, age 8. My mom offered me five dollars if I washed the dishes. I did it and when she came back from my auntie's house, she gave me the money. I wasn't smart at the time. I was sitting in my living room watching television. I didn't have any pockets in my pants so when I left the living room to go to my room so I could sleep, I left my money where I was sitting. I came back the next day expecting it was going to be there. But it wasn't there. I was so mad. I asked my mom who took my money. "How am I supposed to know where you kept your money?" she said in Cambodian. I kept trying to find it everyday when I passed, sat, or just stood there like a Californian looking for gold in the tunnel that would never find. I was so frustrated. I felt like jumping into another person's body and beating them up, but there was nothing I could do about it. Then I decided to ask everyone in my family, "Have you seen or taken my money?" Then they said, "I

don't know." All of a sudden my sister said that my older brother has it. I went to confront him and he was denying it. I did believe him because I really didn't know who did and I couldn't just blame it on him. So, I let it go. After all I went through looking for five dollars, I learned that money could come and go at any time.

### **My Heart**

I felt like a bug that got smashed. My heart felt like it was out of place, but still beating faster and faster. My heart was beating like I was running 90 laps non-stop. My heart was sad. I didn't want to live. I also didn't want to die.

I just wanted to be left alone.