

Room

by **Elsa Valmidiano**

Illustrated by **Ester Petschar**

Curriculum developed by **Kevin Stricke** and **Tiffany Owens**

Supplementary curriculum and copy editing by **Léna Garcia**



OVERVIEW

Quick Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

Student Population	
Age/Grade Level Appropriateness	* Ages 13 and up * Grades 8 and up
Genre/s	Realistic literary fiction Autobiography
Length	2,653 words
Content Advisories	Occasional cursing Some words in Tagalog A child's description of defecation
One Sentence Summary	A young girl, who immigrated from the Philippines, comes to realize that her family is different from her friends' families — and poorer — when she brings a friend home from school.

Lesson Planning	
Topic/s	Making friends Cultural assimilation Social/sociocultural status Poverty Immigrant experiences
Key Theme/s Overview	Yearning for acceptance/fitting in Self-discovery Identity Shifting friendships Child vs. adult perception
Historic Events / Time Period for Study	Contemporary immigration issues and experiences Filipino-American cultural experience
Complementary Classic and Historic Texts	Novel: <i>The House on Mango Street</i> by Sandra Cisneros Short story: "Rules of the Game" by Amy Tan

Lesson Planning	
Author and Artists Information	<p>Elsa Valmidiano was raised in Los Angeles and is a member of the Philippine American Writers and Artists, Inc. She lives in Oakland, CA.</p> <p>Ester Petschar is a Los Angeles-based visual fine artist.</p>

Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.C, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.A, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.C, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.D, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5.B, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.8, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.D, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.6, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5.A, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.A, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.B, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.C, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.D, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.6, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.8, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.9, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.4, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.5, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.6</p>
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Author Biography

Elsa Valmidiano, Philippine-born and L.A.-raised in the City of Carson, is currently an Oakland resident. She is a writer, poet, partner, feminist, globe trekker, and women’s freedom fighter. Her works have appeared in various literary journals such as *maganda* magazine, *TAYO*, *make/shift* magazine, *Burner Magazine*, *As/Us*, and others, as well as the anthologies *Field of Mirrors*, *Walang Hiya*, and *Same Difference*. She holds a BA from UC San Diego, a JD from Syracuse University, an MFA from Mills College, and is a long-time member of the Philippine American Writers and Artists, Inc., based in San Francisco, where she has performed numerous readings. You can follow her on Twitter at Evalmidiano.

Artist Biography

Ester Petschar is a visual fine artist who has shown her work at many Los Angeles-area galleries and exhibitions. She is always adding new techniques to her work, which frequently focuses on her cultural heritage as a Latina. She attended the Santa Monica College of Design, Art and Architecture and Pasadena City College.

SYNOPSIS

Josie, her parents, and her brother all share a single bedroom in her aunt and uncle's home after having immigrated to the United States from the Philippines. She and her brother are told to be absolutely silent when they arrive home from school before the adults have returned, or they will be heard and subsequently deported by the police. As Josie begins to spend more time with friends, even inviting Liliana over to play one day after school, she begins to understand that not everyone lives as she does. The knowledge brings with it a variety of feelings about status, friends, fitting in, socio-economics, and an awareness of her own situation in the context of a diverse culture.

CURRICULUM

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

Topic

Think about how difficult it can be to make friends and fit in with your peers. In a 10 to 15-minute journal entry, write a paragraph addressing the following question: Should or shouldn't one hide aspects of one's familial background, personality, identity, or beliefs, in order to fit in and make friends?

Analyze and explain the pros and cons of both sides of this question. You may also include a personal anecdote supporting your position.

Additional option: Do an informal poll with the class to see if one perspective is more strongly preferred than the other.

Main Ideas

A fundamental aspect of identity comes from our role in our community or society. People have a strong need to know where they fit in. We also seek a sense of esteem coming from the acceptance and respect of others. Do a quick search on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and read for a basic understanding of what it is.

Part 1: Once you have read about Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, consider Josie’s situation in “Room.” Which of her needs do you think she is serving with her choices and actions in the story? List them in your journal.

Part 2: Now, make a second list. This list should be about the many things we do to try to establish our role in society and to seek acceptance from others. Write a journal entry comparing and contrasting your two lists.

Optional Class Discussion: After you have had enough time to make your lists, hold a class discussion about the many criteria we use to see value in others and the things we do to seek acceptance from others.

Passage-Specific Themes

Read this passage from “Room”:

“More than half of my classmates had a dad in the Navy and their mom was a nurse. Mommy and Pop were neither and it made me feel kind of special. At the same time, I wondered why Pop hadn’t joined the Navy and why Mommy wasn’t a nurse like everyone else’s parents. When I did ask them, Pop laughed at me, ‘Do you really think that’s better, Josie?’ I didn’t know and I didn’t answer. It had been a stupid question even though I didn’t know why it was stupid, but I did know stupid questions don’t deserve answers according to Pop.”

How does the speaker characterize her father in this paragraph? What details does she provide that tell us what kind of a person her Pop is and what type of person he is not? Discuss these questions in your journal.

Universal Themes

Living in Southern California, we all have experiences with people from backgrounds different than our own. Sometimes we find ourselves as the outsider coming in from another neighborhood, city, state, or country. Other times we are established and comfortable in our social role, and we are the ones welcoming newcomers.

In a two to three-paragraph response, address the following questions: What are some of the challenges and barriers of establishing yourself in a new social environment, like a new school, town, or country? Why is it so hard to fit in sometimes? Ideally, what should we do to promote a sense of acceptance in people who are new to our community? What kinds of things can we do to make people feel welcome and accepted?

Key Vocabulary

Definitions are very context-dependent. Make sure that any definitions you look up or work from are the ones that most correctly fit in the context of the story.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
Filipinos	Immaculate Conception	Tagalog
deport	conceited	butó
turntable	fidgeting	Hapa
scowling	abruptly	Mestizo
Philippines	console	Ilocano
		bibingka
		ukininam

Vocabulary Activities

- Several of the words in “Room” are in the Tagalog language. What is the effect of using non-English words to tell the story? How does that impact our understanding of the author’s experience? Research Tagalog and write a paragraph summarizing the key facts about the language and its speakers. Then discuss whether a reader can still follow this story without knowing the English translation of these words. Give an example to support your position.
- How do Lilliana’s word choices hurt the speaker’s feelings? Write a one to two-paragraph response citing specific words and examples from “Room.”
- What does the word “deport” mean? What does it mean in the context of the story? Research then, in a written response, discuss this word, its history, its current usage in the news and in society, and how this information compares to its use in the story. Why is this word so significant for Josie’s parents, and why do they use it with such emphasis?

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

- Are Lilliana and the speaker friends or not? What makes you think so?
- How does the speaker try to balance being a Filipina and being an American girl?
- Why does the speaker choose these events to tell us her story?
- Why does the speaker’s family tell her to stay on the couch every day until they get home?

Text-Dependent Questions

1. Why do the children’s family members tell them not to move from the sofa, not to trust other people, etc.? Are the family members afraid? Are they simply laying down rules? Is there another reason? Cite examples from the text to explain your answer.
2. Why do the speaker and her brother play the Michael Jackson record so loud? What are they trying to discover?
3. What is the significance of the scene with the clothespin? Why do you think the speaker included this memory in the story?
4. The author is taught not to waste food, but after she sees her friend throw away half an order of chili fries, she begins to think she “can do the same.” Why does the author think about changing?
5. Read the following sentence from the story: “He didn’t scream, but each word seemed to weigh a thousand pounds.” This simple sentence delivers a significant impact. What literary device is being used here, and why is it so powerful in the context of the story?
6. As you look carefully and examine the illustration for this story, which characters are meant to be Josie and her brother? Are they on or behind the couch? Are they both? What about the characters’ expressions, gestures, and posture give you clues as to who they are supposed to be? What do you see in the picture that matches the descriptions in the story?

Writing Exercises

Narrative

Write a story about a time you had a friend over or you went to a friend’s house and their family dynamic and habits were different from your own. Include specific plot and action details to help your reader feel and visualize what you experienced. How did you respond to the situation?

Descriptive

The scene in which Josie and her brother are singing loudly is funny. Describe a time when you and a relative or friend tested a boundary to see if the consequence would be as bad as you were warned. Use imagery and characterization to help your reader see and feel the moment.

Analysis

The playdate was an unfamiliar experience for both girls, who were exposed to realities they had never seen before. Write a short essay in which you analyze how Josie’s perspective expands as she begins to see the world through the eyes of her peers. Include specific examples from the text to support your points.

Complementary Reading Text

The House on Mango Street is a 1984 coming-of-age novel by Mexican-American writer Sandra Cisneros. It tells the story of Esperanza Cordero, a young Latina girl who grows up in Chicago with Chicanos and Puerto Ricans. (Wikipedia)

Read the following excerpt from chapter one of *The House on Mango Street*:

“We didn’t always live on Mango Street. Before that we lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that we lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that I can’t remember. But what I remember most is moving a lot. Each time it seemed there’d be one more of us. By the time we got to Mango Street we were six — Mama, Papa, Carlos, Kiki, my sister Nenny and me.

The house on Mango Street is ours, and we don’t have to pay rent to anybody, or share the yard with the people downstairs, or be careful not to make too much noise, and there isn’t a landlord banging on the ceiling with a broom. But even so, it’s not the house we’d thought we’d get.

We had to leave the flat on Loomis quick. The water pipes broke and the landlord wouldn’t fix them because the house was too old. We had to leave fast. We were using the washroom next door and carrying water over in empty milk gallons. That’s why Mama and Papa looked for a house, and that’s why we moved into the house on Mango Street, far away, on the other side of town.

They always told us that one day we would move into a house, a real house that would be ours for always so we wouldn’t have to move each year. And our house would have running water and pipes that worked. And inside it would have real stairs, not hallway stairs, but stairs inside like the houses on T.V. And we’d have a basement and at least three washrooms so when we took a bath we wouldn’t have to tell everybody. Our house would be white with trees around it, a great big yard and grass growing without a fence. This was the house Papa talked about when he held a lottery ticket and this was the house Mama dreamed up in the stories she told us before we went to bed.”

Writing Exercise

Research the concept and evolution of the American Dream. Then compare and contrast how the speakers in “Room” and *The House on Mango Street* — and their immigrant families — define and pursue the American Dream. How are their desires the same as those of other Americans? How are they different? How are they the same and different from each other?

Activity Options

Classroom Activity One

Write a paragraph about a time you were embarrassed by your family or living situation. After writing, rip up your painful memories without showing them to anyone.

Classroom Activity Two

Create a presentation about your family's heritage or your own heritage that incorporates both words and images. How and when did your or your family end up in the United States? Present your work to your class.

Home Activity

Interview an older family member, neighbor, or friend about how they have adapted throughout their lives to the ongoing cultural changes in U.S. society. Address behavioral norms, fashion, and technology, among other things.

You are responsible for developing five to ten interview questions. When your interview is complete, write a feature article about the person you interviewed.

Guest Speaker

Invite a member of the Filipino community who immigrated to the United States to speak about their culture and their immigration experience.

OR

Invite the author and/or artist to come and speak to the class about their experiences and choices in writing or interpreting the story.

Field Trip

Take a trip to Unidad Park in Los Angeles' Historic Filipino town, and visit the nation's largest Filipino American mural, Gintong Kasaysayan, Gintong Pamana (Filipino Americans: A Glorious History, A Golden Legacy).

Research the Filipinos and scenes portrayed in the mural in advance. After your trip, write a fictionalized narrative about your trip including details and strong imagery.

Learn more about the mural and the park here:

Unveiled on June 24, 1995, it is the nation’s largest Filipino American mural. In 1997, the City of Los Angeles Board of Cultural Affairs Commissioners awarded the mural its first ever Award of Design Excellence for public art. The mural was likewise featured in Los Angeles County Museum’s ‘Made in California: Art, Image and Identity 1900-200’ as well as the Smithsonian Institute’s travelling exhibition celebrating 100 years of Filipino migration to the USA called ‘Singgalot (The Ties That Bind):

From Colonial Subjects to Citizens’. The mural was painted by then 22-year old artist Eliseo Art Silva while a senior attending nearby Otis College of Art and Design. According to the artist, “...the mural encapsulates 5,000 years of Filipino and Filipino American history; the design is divided into two parts: the first is historical (represented by the outline of a fish at sea), leading up to the awakening of Filipino national and political consciousness; the second part is dominated by a huge bird with significant Filipino-Americans on its wings, the farm workers on the bottom left and the youth and community on the right.”

Unidad Park’s design was conceptualized by leaders and stakeholders of the Filipino community and based largely from submitted renderings by the mural artist Eliseo Silva, which includes the Philippine Bontoc/Kankana-ey communal gathering place, park features and a community garden referencing the Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as an entrance walkway based on a design by Filipino American Pedro Flores. The park is a popular destination for the neighborhood with its Dap-ay used by students and the sandbox inside this space used by toddlers, the interactive play area, community garden as well as onsite barbecue grills with matching tables and benches for family gatherings and parties, enhanced by a covered tent to protect park users from the sun and rain.

TEST PREPARATION COMPONENT

Partner Activity:

Pair up. Acting as either Josie or Liliana, create a “double-bubble map” for your character’s life experiences and way of looking at the world. You may wish to focus on each girl’s perception of the playdate described in Elsa Valmidiano’s “Room.”

Instructions for double-bubble map: In the five bubbles connected only to Josie’s name, bullet note the key elements of her experience. In the five bubbles stemming only from Liliana’s name, bullet note the key elements unique to her experience. Use the center five bubbles to note similarities between both girls’ experiences.

Individual Writing Prompt:

In one paragraph, write a diary entry describing the playdate at Josie’s house from Liliana’s perspective. In another paragraph, write a diary entry describing the afternoon from Josie’s own perspective. Be sure to draw on concrete details from the story, as well as the observations from your double-bubble map.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE

This story and its exercises are appropriate for 8-12th grade. Eighth-grade standards are cited.

Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.C Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others’ questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

Vocabulary Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on grade 8 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.A Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence or paragraph; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.C Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning or its part of speech.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.4.D Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5.B Use the relationship between particular words to better understand each of the words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.C Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.D Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.

Text-Dependent Question Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.6 Analyze how differences in the points of view of the characters and the audience or reader (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.5.A Interpret figures of speech (e.g. verbal irony, puns) in context.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

Writing Exercise Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.A Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.B Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.C Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from onetime frame or setting to another, and show the relationships among experiences and events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.3.D Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

Complementary Reading Text Writing Exercise

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.5 Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and present the relationships between information and ideas efficiently as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.5 Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.C Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1.D Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.