

Before You Read

Four Skinny Trees and Chanclas

Connect to the Vignette and Short Story

Think about a time when you felt awkward or embarrassed. How did you handle the situation?

Quickwrite Freewrite for a few minutes about a time when you overcame feelings of awkwardness or embarrassment.

Build Background

Author Sandra Cisneros is well known for her short stories and vignettes describing growing up as a Latina girl. A vignette is a short literary sketch that describes something or paints a picture in words. In the vignette "Four Skinny Trees," the narrator describes what she has in common with the trees outside her house.

The short story "Chanclas" takes place in a neighborhood where many Latinos live. *Chanclas* is a Spanish word meaning "old, worn-out shoes." Most of the action in the story takes place at a fiesta celebrating a baptism. A baptism is a formal ceremony that welcomes a new member, often a child, into the Christian church. A *fiesta*, or celebration, is often held after the ceremony.

Set Purposes for Reading

BQ BIG Question

As you read, ask yourself, how do the narrators draw courage and confidence from their surroundings and from other people?

Literary Element Voice

Voice is an author's distinctive **style**, or the way an author chooses and arranges words and sentences. An author's voice can reveal his or her purpose in writing and attitude toward his or her subject and audience. For example, Sandra Cisneros sometimes runs sentences together without punctuation. Her purpose is to quicken the pace of the story, build suspense, and make the words sound like spoken language.

As you read, ask yourself, how does Cisneros create a unique voice by choosing and arranging words and sentences? How does she use repetition and personification, a figure of speech in which an animal, object, or idea is given human form or characteristics? How does her voice appeal to my senses and emotions?

Learning Objectives

For pages 666–671

In studying this text, you will focus on the following objectives:

Literary Study:

Analyzing voice.

Analyzing personification.

Meet Sandra Cisneros



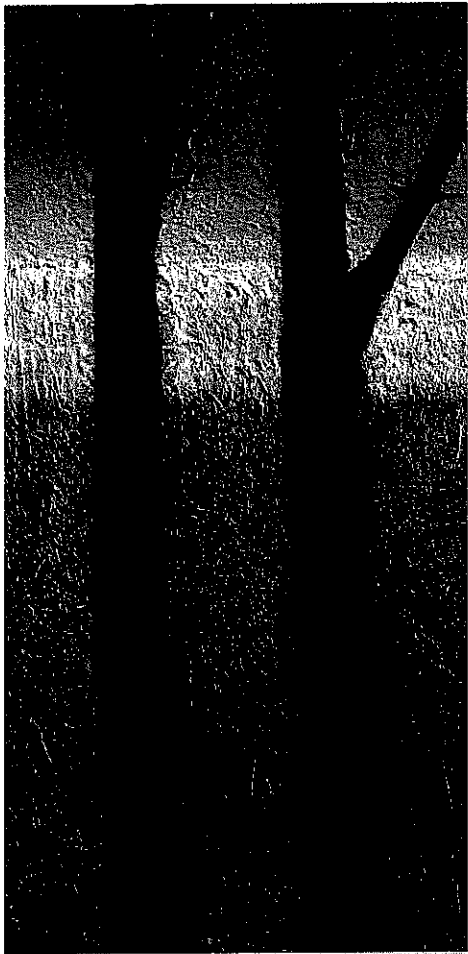
A Distinctive Voice Sandra Cisneros's family was poor and moved frequently between the United States and Mexico, where her father's parents lived. Later, she wrote stories based on her early experiences of "third-floor flats, and fear of rats."

Cisneros was born in 1954.

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Literature Online

Author Search For more about Sandra Cisneros, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u5.



Trees, 1990. Gerrit Greve.

Four Skinny Trees

Sandra Cisneros

They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here. Four raggedy excuses planted by the city.

From our room we can hear them, but Nenny just sleeps and doesn't appreciate these things.

Their strength is secret. They send ferocious roots beneath the ground. They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth between their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth and never quit their anger. This is how they keep.

Let one forget his reason for being, they'd all droop like tulips in a glass, each with their arms around the other. Keep, keep, keep, trees say when I sleep. They teach.

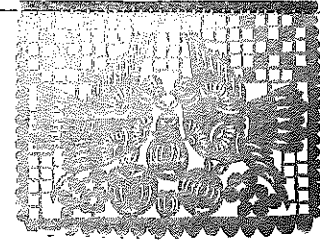
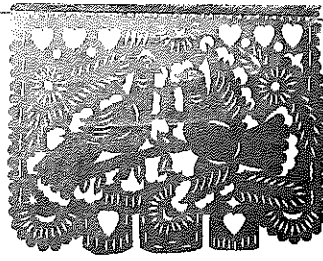
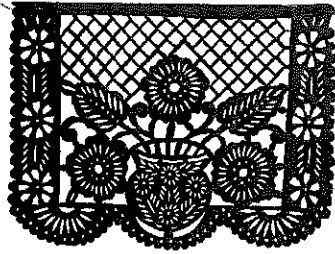
When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be.

Visual Vocabulary

Tulips are bell-shaped flowers.



Voice What characteristics do you notice about the author's voice here?



Chanclas

Sandra Cisneros

It's me—Mama, Mama said. I open up and she's there with bags and big boxes, the new clothes and, yes, she's got the socks and a new slip with a little rose on it and a pink and white striped dress. What about the shoes? I forgot. Too late now. I'm tired. Whew!

Six-thirty already and my little cousin's baptism is over. All day waiting, the door locked, don't open up for nobody, and I don't till Mama gets back and buys everything except the shoes.

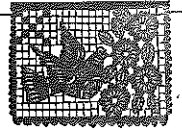
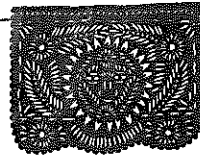
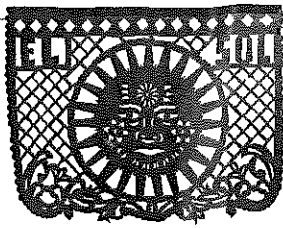
Now Uncle Nacho is coming in his car, and we have to hurry and get to Precious Blood Church quick because that's where the baptism party is, in the basement rented for today for dancing and tamales and everyone's kids running all over the place.

Mama dances, laughs, dances. All of a sudden, Mama is sick. I fan her hot face with a paper plate. Too many tamales, but Uncle Nacho says too many this and tilts his thumb to his lips.

Everybody laughing except me, because I'm wearing the new dress, pink and white with stripes, and new underclothes and new socks and the old saddle shoes¹ I

Voice How does the sentence structure in this paragraph reflect the activity being described?

¹ **Saddle shoes** tie with laces and rise to just below the ankle. What makes a saddle shoe distinctive is the band, or "saddle," of color across the middle that contrasts with the color of the rest of the shoe.



wear to school, brown and white, the kind I get every September because they last long and they do. My feet scuffed and round, and the heels all crooked that look dumb with this dress, so I just sit.

Meanwhile that boy who is my cousin by first communion² or something, asks me to dance and I can't. Just stuff my feet under the metal folding chair stamped Precious Blood and pick on a wad of brown gum that's stuck beneath the seat. I shake my head no. My feet growing bigger and bigger.

Then Uncle Nacho is pulling and pulling my arm and it doesn't matter how new the dress Mama bought, is because my feet are ugly until my uncle who is a liar says, You are the prettiest girl here, will you dance, but I believe him, and yes, we are dancing, my Uncle Nacho and me, only I don't want to at first. My feet swell big and heavy like plungers, but I drag them across the linoleum floor straight center where Uncle wants to show off the new dance we learned. And Uncle spins me, and my skinny arms bend the way he taught me, and my mother watches, and my little cousins watch, and the boy who is my cousin by first communion watches, and everyone says, wow, who are those two who dance like in the movies, until I forget that I am wearing only ordinary shoes, brown and white, the kind my mother buys each year for school.

And all I hear is the clapping when the music stops. My uncle and me bow and he walks me back in my thick shoes to my mother who is proud to be my mother. All night the boy who is a man watches me dance. He watched me dance. ♪

Voice Why might the author have chosen to break a grammar rule in this sentence?

BQ BIG Question

What gives the speaker the courage to dance?



2 In the Roman Catholic Church, children of a similar age often receive their first communion as a group. The speaker's *cousin by first communion* is someone who was in the same group when she received her first communion.

After You Read

Respond and Think Critically

1. In your own words, tell what happens in the first paragraph of "Four Skinny Trees." [Paraphrase]
2. What do you think makes the narrator of "Four Skinny Trees" strong? Support your answer with details from the story. [Interpret]
3. Why was the narrator in "Chanclas" waiting for her mother? Explain. [Recall]
4. Think about the importance the narrator of "Chanclas" places on her shoes. How does wearing the shoes affect the narrator's behavior? Explain. [Analyze]
5. Is "Chanclas" a fitting title for the story? Why or why not? Explain. [Evaluate]
6. **BQ** **BIG Question** How are the narrators of "Four Skinny Trees" and "Chanclas" similar? Where do the narrators find their courage and confidence? Use details to support your answer. [Evaluate]

Academic Vocabulary

You can tell that Uncle Nacho is a **significant** person in the speaker's family because he drives the family to the party and asks the narrator to dance. To become more familiar with the word *significant*, fill in the graphic organizer below.

definition	synonyms
significant	
antonyms	sentence/image

TIP

Evaluating

To answer question 6, you will need to think about the selections.

- Skim paragraphs two and four of "Four Skinny Trees" to see how the trees and the speaker are described. Explain the connection between the speaker and the trees. Consider how the trees influence the speaker.
- Think about how the narrator's emotions change from the beginning of "Chanclas" to the end of the story. Describe the change and what caused the speaker's feelings to change.

FOLDABLES Study Organizer Keep track of your ideas about the **BIG Question** in your unit Foldable.

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Selection Resources

For Selection Quizzes, eFlashcards, and Reading-Writing Connection activities, go to glencoe.com and enter QuickPass code GL29763u5.