

Four Skinny Trees

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 their 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.

(Cisneros, S. (1984). "Four Skinny Trees." *The House on Mango Street*. New York: Vintage Books, pp. 74-75.)

**Writing in the style of our mentor text:
 "Four Skinny Trees" from the novel *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros**

- prose poetry:** poetry that is written in paragraph form
- vignette (vin-yet):** a fairly brief description that evokes emotions; a type of prose poetry
- personification:** using human qualities to describe things that are not human
- simile:** comparing unlike things using "like", "as", or "than"
- metaphor:** comparing unlike things *without* using "like", "as", or "than"

Part I. Literary Analysis

Identify four examples of figurative language (or poetic device) of personification, simile, and metaphor in this vignette, which is told by the character Esperanza. In the first column write what the text says literally (a direct quotation). In the middle column identify which poetic device it is. In the last column analyze the meaning deeper. The first example is done for you.

LOOK! What does the text say literally?	Poetic Device (Analyze!)	Meaning (Analyze! Prove it!) This shows. . . . I can infer. . . . This implies. . . . Esperanza feels. . . .
"They [the trees] are the only ones who understand me."	Personification	Esperanza feels a connection to the trees, but to no one else.

- (So what?** How can I relate this text to other information and situations, or to me?)
3. What is the author's intent in this passage? In other words, what message or life lesson is Cisneros trying to tell us, her readers?

Part II. Observing Nature

The main character in Sandra Cisneros's poem, *Esperanza*, compares herself to the four skinny trees outside her window. She uses personification to give the trees human-like qualities and then compares these qualities to attributes about herself that are similar. In making this comparison and identifying herself as similar to the four skinny trees, we read an *extended metaphor*—a metaphor that grows, or extends, as it compares the two unlike things in more detail.

Plan a "Four Skinny Trees" vignette of your own where you will follow Cisneros's style and form. **It will be your job to develop an extended metaphor, comparing yourself to something in nature, and personifying that element of nature in order to make it seem as though it has human qualities that are similar to qualities about yourself.** As you add detail about what your natural element does and compare it to yourself, it will become an extended metaphor.

Your vignette should be about a page long, and every idea and word in each sentence should add to the comparison, description of the natural element, or description of yourself. Remember, this is a metaphor, and you will not want to write an explanation of how you are similar, but establish the comparison and then continue connecting yourself to the element in nature through detail.

To help you brainstorm, complete this chart.

Element in Nature:		
What does it look like? Describe.	What does it do? List actions/verbs.	What can be associated with it? List ideas/feelings, people, places and objects.

Part III. Compare Your Element of Nature to Yourself

In the chart below, identify possible human characteristics that your object could have and explain why/how it has this characteristic AND why/how it relates to you. Look at the example from “Four Skinny Trees” below to help get you started.

HUMAN CHARACTERISTIC	WHY/HOW it has this characteristic	WHY/HOW does this relate to YOU?
Strength	Their roots go deep underground, holding firm; they grow high, showing determination & strength	I am proud of my family, I try to reach my goals

Once you have brainstormed enough on the graphic organizers, begin writing your **prose poem**. Your poem needs to be at least one handwritten page long. You may want to re-read “Four Skinny Trees” to inspire you with ways to make your object come alive. Try to give your reader a message about life through your object like Esperanza did in her prose poem.