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## Motivation for a Better Future

Kierra Cooney  
*Butler University*

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Kierra Cooney

### Motivation for a Better Future

Whether it be entering kindergarten or going off to college, getting an iPhone or getting married, as children pass by their many milestones, it is always heard that they are growing up way too fast. Adults say this all the time about their own kids or other kids around them. However, there are certain cases when this growing up is not a matter of time flying by, but a matter of situation. In some families and parts of the world, children are forced to grow up quickly in order to take care of their siblings or get a job. This expedited childhood, or lack of a childhood altogether, causes children to take on adult roles prematurely. In *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, Abdul is the main financial support of his household and has been working since age six (Boo). Similarly, in *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza takes care of her siblings and later is advised by her father to get a job (Cisneros). In both literary works, readers see Abdul and Esperanza grow up prematurely due to their unfortunate circumstances. In turn, this rushed childhood causes them to dream of a better future.

While Abdul and Esperanza's situations differ, they share the common factor of having poor economic conditions. In Abdul's home, "his family lacked the floor space for all of its members to lie down" (Boo 3), and in Esperanza's house, "everybody has to share a bedroom" (Cisneros 5). From the beginning of their stories, readers are introduced to the adverse living and economic conditions that force both Abdul and Esperanza to get jobs to contribute financially to their families. Blame could be immediately placed on the parents; however, it is a last resort in order to prevent their conditions from worsening. As Abdul's mother, Zehrnesia, details when stating that she didn't know how old Abdul really was, "you didn't keep track of a child's years

when you were fighting daily to keep him from starving” (Boo 121). This heartwrenching explanation further shows that the parents of Abdul and Esperanza were doing the best they could to keep their children healthy, even if it meant that they would not necessarily have a childhood anymore. In Abdul’s reflection on young children who had been detained for working at their young age, he said, “being so poor that you had to work so young seemed like punishment enough” (Boo 128). After reading this, one can see that Abdul is upset that he had to work from such a young age, but he realizes that working was a necessary evil to keep his family afloat.

Aside from Abdul and Esperanza’s jobs accelerating their childhood, the outside situations occurring also caused them to mature. Abdul experiences prejudice, corruption, police brutality, and many more injustices (Boo). Esperanza parallels some of these, with the addition of experiences of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and rape (Cisneros). In both Abdul and Esperanza’s case, a maturation occurs due to their exposure to biases towards them. For example, Abdul’s father’s identity as a Muslim immigrant caused “some people in this slum [to wish] his family ill because of the old Hindu-Muslim resentments” (Boo x). Esperanza, a Mexican-American girl, also faces biases due to her race. In the neighborhood she lives in, there are mostly those of Latino heritage, and Esperanza states that “those who don’t know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we’re dangerous” (Cisneros 28). In both situations, the main characters face prejudice and are exposed to it from an early age. Therefore, readers can see the acknowledgement and understanding of these biases in both characters. This shows that not only do they experience prejudice, but they have been forced to mature enough to understand this discrimination.

These unfortunate circumstances lead them to resent their situations and dream for a better future. Esperanza resents her home and dreams of living somewhere else (Cisneros), as does Abdul who wants to leave Annawadi (Boo). This is evident in both books as readers see the characters detail their wishes. As Esperanza says in *The House on Mango Street*, “One day I will say goodbye to Mango. I am too strong for her to keep me here forever. One day I will go away” (Cisneros 110). Likewise, Boo writes in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* that, “what Abdul wanted was a wife... and eventually a home somewhere, anywhere, that was not Annawadi” (xvii-xviii). As detailed in both Abdul and Esperanza’s dreams, they both want to leave where they are, and this is contributed to by the fact that they had to work and live in unfavorable conditions. Neither has designated a place they want to go, but both know they want to leave behind where they are right now. This desire to leave could be instantly blamed on the parents. However, it was actually out of the parents’ control. The poor conditions of Abdul and Esperanza’s nonexistent childhoods were created by their societal and economic standing. Abdul and Esperanza are trying to leave this situation behind, not their family, in order to create a better life. In a way, this is similar to what their own parents were doing. Their parents tried to create the best life for their families, as Abdul and Esperanza are going to attempt to do, when they grow up and have families of their own.

Ultimately, Abdul and Esperanza endure a lack of a childhood. It is very unfortunate that they didn’t have the chance to be a kid and stay innocent, naïve, and careless for as long as they should have, but these conditions were essential for their families to survive. However, instead of dwelling on it, they simply worked harder to create a better future for themselves. Readers can clearly see the extreme dedication, sacrifice, and hard work that these characters exhibit, even in

the face of adversity. The lack of childhood these characters experience is devastating to outsiders, but Abdul and Esperanza make the most of it. They acknowledge the situation they are in and use it as motivation to work harder in order to achieve their ultimate goals of escaping their current situation for a better life in the future. As said in *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*, “it was a painful way to get through life, but Abdul was drawn to the happy ending” (Boo 132).

Works Cited

Boo, Katherine. *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, death, and hope in a Mumbai undercity*.

Random House, 2012

Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*. Vintage Books, 1984