

**“We could be sisters, right?”:
Applying a Youth Lens to Community and Identity in
*Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories***

Despite containing child and teen protagonists, Sandra Cisneros’s 1991 short story collection, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, is overlooked as a substantial text for childhood studies. Current research regarding children in Cisneros’s texts is primarily focused on 1984’s *The House on Mango Street*. This focus limits the unique position of *Woman Hollering Creek*. The reach of the text can be expanded with a youth lens that emphasizes that working-class Chicanas individual success and autonomy is empowered by community.

The growth that the adult protagonists experience is heavily influenced by cultural norms that often manifest in childhood. L.M. Lewis explains that “the protagonists grow in several ways, through several ages, from being defined by others, toward some self-definition, from confusion on the margins of two or three ethnic cultures, to a mature and expansive synthesis” (69). Within *Woman Hollering Creek*, how child protagonists navigate their identity against these norms is a persistent concern that continues into adulthood.

My argument looks at three “child” stories and one “adult” story to demonstrate the value of applying a childhood studies lens, particularly a youth lens, to *Woman Hollering Creek*. Although *Woman Hollering Creek* is a text primarily viewed as for adults, a youth lens helps to highlight the central themes of community, identity, and female empowerment. Robert Petrone Et al. explain that a youth lens approach to reading literature uses interdisciplinary methods for reading representations of adolescents and adolescence.

I look more specifically at the repeated influence of working-class Chicana culture and community (or lack thereof) on each of the four protagonists’ sense of identity. *Woman Hollering Creek* reflects the complexities of identity that girls, as they become women, repeatedly face. The protagonists mirror for young readers the multiple possibilities that an affirming female community opens for them including solidarity, agency, and hope for the future. Through asserting the evolving and differing needs for her protagonists in combating hostile power dynamics, Cisneros’s text is not just realistic, but hopeful.