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| (Pg. 727) An Interview with Sandra Cisneros **from The Infinite Mind**  **Marit Haahr.** Writer Sandra Cisneros was born in Chicago in the 1950s, the third child and only daughter of seven. Her books include The House on Mango Street and Woman Hollering Creek. She’s won numerous awards, including the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, which is often called the genius grant. Her latest novel, Caramelo, [was] published in September [2002].   |  | | --- | | **Haahr.** You were recently published in an anthology entitled Growing Up Poor. With that in mind, I’d actually like to begin with a reading from your short story collection Woman Hollering Creek. Can you describe this story, “Salvador Late or Early,” for our listeners? |   **Sandra Cisneros.** I didn’t intend it to be a story. I thought perhaps it’d be a poem. I was remembering a classmate of mine I couldn’t forget. So it began from that place of not being able to forget.  Cisneros now reads the story. (Pg. 728)   |  | | --- | | **Haahr.** Thank you. It’s certainly clear that the image that Salvador left in your mind was very strong. Why do you think that was? |   **Cisneros.** Because he sat in front of me and his shirts were always wrinkled and the collars were dirty. I thought, “Doesn’t his mama love him?” I thought about him a lot, and I remembered him so clearly. I remember walking down streets visiting my aunt and thinking, “Now that kind of building must be the kind that Salvador lives in.” I knew him [intimately](javascript:popvocabulary(intimately,'Vocabulary');), perhaps more than he knew himself, and he stayed with me all the years. I realized when I finished writing the story that he was me. That’s why I could know what he did and what kind of a house he lived in and who his younger brothers were and who he had to wait for—all the things that a tiny being like that knew and the remarkable things that perhaps he had to take care of that he never thought of as remarkable.   |  | | --- | | **Haahr.** I know that one of the defining features of your childhood was growing up without much money. What were the physical circumstances of your childhood like? |   **Cisneros.** Well, you know, it came [to me] at a very young age that we just didn’t have money for everything. My older brother was the one that would always pull me aside and say, “Don’t ask for anything. Papa doesn’t have any money,” or “Don’t shame him by asking for something that he can’t give you or that he’ll give you and that’ll hurt us later in the week.” So there was the sense of being responsible for the others. I was very conscious of it when I went to Catholic school, because there was a class difference between myself and the majority of the students in the school that I went to.   |  | | --- | | **Haahr.** How did being conscious of that affect you? |   **Cisneros.** It made you responsible. It made you want to be protective of your mother and father and not ask for too many things. It made you, sometimes, I think, value money in a way that perhaps your classmates did not, because you had to save for the things that you really wanted. When my father died, he was sad and cried and said he wished he could have given us more. And I said he gave us just enough, because we valued what we had, and we worked for what we had. That was a lesson you can’t learn in Harvard. | 1. Why is this information included before the interview? 2. How did the interviewer phrase the question in a way that Cisneros would have to give a detailed response? 3. How did the interviewer show that they were listening carefully to Cisneros? 4. Why do you think Salvador left such a great impact on Cisneros? 5. Why is this a better question than, “What was your childhood like?” 6. What connections can you make here between Cisneros and Salvador? 7. How does the interviewer get more information from Cisneros here? |

1. What does Cisneros mean when she says, “That was a lesson you can’t learn in Harvard”? What lesson is she talking about?