Your *abuelito*\(^1\) is dead, Papa says early one morning in my room. *Está muerto*,\(^2\) and then as if he just heard the news himself, crumples like a coat and cries, my brave Papa cries. I have never seen my Papa cry and don’t know what to do.

I know he will have to go away, that he will take a plane to Mexico, all the uncles and aunts will be there, and they will have

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**BACKGROUND**

In Mexico, death is thought to be a passing over to another place. Rituals relating to death are mixed with familiar settings and activities to help the suffering of the relatives and to honor the person who has died.

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**A VOCABULARY**

Academic Vocabulary

What *incident*, or event, has taken place?

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**B LITERARY FOCUS**

What *universal theme* do you think this poem addresses?

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2. *Está muerto* (EHS TAH MWEHR TOH): Spanish for “He is dead.”

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“Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark” from *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros. Copyright © 1984 by Sandra Cisneros. Published by Vintage Books, a division of Random House, Inc., and in hardcover by Alfred A. Knopf in 1994. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of Susan Bergholz Literary Services, New York, NY and Lamy, NM. No alterations of any type may be made to this selection without the explicit permission of the copyright holder.
a black-and-white photo taken in front of the tomb with flowers shaped like spears in a white vase because this is how they send the dead away in that country.

Because I am the oldest, my father has told me first, and now it is my turn to tell the others. I will have to explain why we can't play. I will have to tell them to be quiet today.

My Papa, his thick hands and thick shoes, who wakes up tired in the dark, who combs his hair with water, drinks his coffee, and is gone before we wake, today is sitting on my bed.

And I think if my own Papa died what would I do. I hold my Papa in my arms. I hold and hold and hold him.