No Speak English
By Sandra Cisneros from House on Mango Street

Mamacita is the big mama of the man across the street, third-floor front. Rachel says her name ought to be Mamasota, but I think that’s mean.

The man saved his money to bring her here. He saved and saved because she was alone with the baby boy in that country. He worked two jobs. He came home late and he left early. Every day.

Then one day Mamacita and the baby boy arrived in a yellow taxi. The taxi door opened like a waiter’s arm. Out stepped a tiny pinky shoe, a foot soft as rabbit’s ear, then the thick ankle, a flutter of hips, fuchsia roses and green perfume. The man had to pull her, the taxicab driver had to push. Push, pull. Push, pull. Poof!

All at once she bloomed. Huge, enormous, beautiful to look at from the salmon-pink feather on the tip of her hat down to the little rosebuds of her toes. I couldn’t take my eyes off her tiny shoes. Up, up, up the stairs she went with the baby boy in a blue blanket, the man carrying her suitcases, her lavender hatboxes, a dozen boxes of satin high heels. Then we didn’t see her.

Somebody said because she’s too fat, somebody because of the three flights of stairs, but I believe she doesn’t come out because she is afraid to speak English, and maybe this is so since she only knows eight words. She knows to say: He is not here for when the landlord comes, No speak English if anybody else comes, and Holy smokes. I don’t know where she learned this, but I heard her say it one time and it surprised me.

My father says when he came to this country he ate hamandeggs for three months. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Hamandeggs. That was the only word he knew. He doesn’t eat hamandeggs anymore.

Whatever her reasons, whether she is fat, or can’t climb the stairs, or is afraid of English, she won’t come down. She sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio show and sings all the homesick songs about her country in a voice that sounds like a seagull.

Home. Home. Home is a house in a photograph, a pink house, pink as hollyhocks with lots of startled light. The man paints the walls of the apartment pink, but it’s not the same, you know. She still sighs for her pink house, and then I think she cries. I would.

Sometimes the man gets disgusted. He starts screaming and you can hear it all the way down the street.

Ay, she says, she is sad.

Oh, he says. Not again.

¿Cuándo, cuándo, cuándo? she asks.

¡Ay caray! We are home. This is home. Here I am and here I stay. Speak English. Speak English. Christ!

¡Ay! Mamacita, who does not belong, every once in a while lets out a cry, hysterical, high, as if he had torn the only skinny thread that kept her alive, the only road out of that country.
And then to break her heart forever, the baby boy, who has begun to talk, starts to sing the Pepsi commercial he heard on T.V.

No speak English, she says to the child who is singing in the language that sounds like tin. No speak English, no speak English, and bubbles into tears. No, no, no, as if she can’t believe her ears.

1. Which of the following best illustrates the conflict between “Mamacita” and her husband?
   a. “He worked two jobs. He came home late and he left early.”
   b. “The man had to pull her, the taxicab driver had to push.”
   c. “Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Hamandegss. That was the only word he knew.”
   d. “Here I am and here I stay. Speak English.”

2. Which of the following best supports the inference that “Mamacita” misses her homeland?
   a. “He saved and saved because she was alone with the baby boy in that country.”
   b. “I believe she doesn’t come out because she is afraid to speak English”
   c. “She sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio show…”
   d. “The man paints the walls of the apartment pink…”

3. Why does Mamacita become sad when she hears her baby talk?
   a. His Spanish accent is too “Americanized”.
   b. She feels the baby is watching too much TV.
   c. The baby’s voice reminds her of her father’s voice.
   d. Her baby is speaking English and not Spanish.

4. What is the reason that Mamacita does not leave the apartment? Support your answer with evidence from the selection.