One Book One Campus: Connection & Community

with Herschel Greenberg

00:00:00 **Herschel**

You're a student and you're at Mt. SAC for the first time and you pick up the book, how you read it will be different. And I think the same thing is true for faculty and staff who maybe read it when they were in school. I think the book is over 25-years-old now. And so I think coming back to it today, the world's different, we're different, the dialogue is different. How do we engage in some of that discussion, I think changes how we read.

00:00:26 **Christina**

Hi, I'm Christina Barsi.

00:00:27 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, and you're listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:00:32 **Christina**

Our mission is to find ways to keep your ear to the ground, so to speak - by bringing to you the activities and events you may not have time to attend, the resources on campus you might want to know more about, the interesting things your colleagues are creating, and the many ways we can continue to better help and guide our students.

00:00:49 **Sun**

We bring to you the voices of Mt. SAC, from the classroom to completion.

00:00:53 **Speaker 1**

And I know I'm going to achieve my goals, and I know people here are going to help me to do it.

00:01:01 **Speaker 2**

She is a sociology major and she's transferring to Cal Poly, Pamona! Psychology major, English major ...

00:01:04 **Sun**

From transforming part-time into full-time-

00:01:06 **Speaker 1**

I really liked the time that we spent with Julie about how to write a CV and a cover letter.

00:01:13 **Christina**

Or just finding time to soak in the campus.

00:01:15 **Speaker 1**

To think of the natural environment around us as a library.

00:01:19 **Christina**

We want to keep you informed and connected to all things Mt. SAC. But most importantly, we want to keep you connected with each other. I'm Christina Barsi, Mt. SAC alumni, and producer of this podcast.

00:01:30 **Sun**

And I'm Sun Ezzell, Learning Assistance Faculty and Professional Learning Academy Coordinator.

00:01:35 **Christina**

And this is the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:01:41 **Christina**

As we know community and connection this year has become specially needed. Hi, this is Christina - and we have had to find unique ways to find it.

00:01:51 **Christina**

In this episode, Herschel Greenberg talks about how One Book, One Campus can be a way to connect and find community. The selection this year is The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros. I hope you enjoy this discussion on how the book was selected, how it's being used, and how you might connect with the One Book, One Community, enjoy.

00:02:16 **Sun**

Well, Herschel Greenberg, welcome back to the Magic Mountie Podcast.

00:02:21 **Herschel**

Thank you, good to be here again.

00:02:23 **Sun**

So, thank you for joining us to talk a little bit about yourself and One Book, One Campus. Would you go ahead and share a little bit about yourself and your interest in One Book, One Campus?

00:02:35 **Herschel**

Oh, sure, thank you. So, hey everybody, my name is Herschel Greenberg. I am an English Instructor at Mt. SAC, and I started teaching here way back in 2007. So, as an English instructor, I enjoy assigning different books every semester, I do change it up.

00:02:52 **Herschel**

I've always been interested in a shared reading experience on campus. Most of my attempt to get involved was at a different college, and it was always designed to be a book chosen by a very secretive group. And so I never felt like I had any say in what book was going to be used.

00:03:11 **Herschel**

And whenever I contributed by suggesting a book, they always went with a different genre. So, if I suggested literature, they'd pick the graphic novel. If I picked the graphic novel, they would go with non-fiction. And so, I never felt like I was on target.

00:03:26 **Herschel**

When an opportunity came up to join the first group of people helping pick a One Book, One Campus for Mt. SAC, I jumped at that opportunity. I really liked the idea that the invitation was sent to everybody, including some students. And that first meeting, we did have some students and we had instructors and faculty and staff from all over campus help pick the very first book.

00:03:49 **Herschel**

And that book was Hyperbole and a Half. And we had a very successful event around that book for almost two years. So, I liked the idea of having the program One Book, One Campus, be more transparent, and be able to have various input from around the campus.

00:04:07 **Herschel**

So, this time around, when we were asked to pick a new book, instead of us picking one, we had a vote. So, the group of people that get together to help decide which books we want to focus on this time around, we picked a topic of sustainability and we suggested three books, and the campus got to vote on those three books. And the winning book was The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros.

00:04:33 **Sun**

So, it was decided by that vote then, everybody who participated on campus. That's very cool. I love how you took your experience and then you made it more democratic.

00:04:43 **Herschel**

Correct and definitely want to make it more transparent. And although House on Mango Street won by a large amount, it was great to see how the other books got a reaction from people who either did or did not vote for it, or ask questions in the discussion forum on our Canvas shell about the pros and cons of using, in particular, each book.

00:05:03 **Herschel**

So, for example, a book that didn't win dealt with what happened 25 years from now, if a virus killed off 99% of the human population. And so, people were like, maybe that's not a book to read during a pandemic. And so, I can see why that book might not have won ... still a book worth reading.

00:05:21 **Herschel**

But I'm very happy The House on Mango Street won. This book is also being supported by the health center. So, I definitely want to give a shout out to the health center. They also give out books to students and it's part of their outreach to the campus community, in particular the students.

00:05:37 **Herschel**

So, working with them is great. I do want to say that Sandra Cisneros was supposed to come visit us on campus in March. Unfortunately, the pandemic changed that, and we are working right now to get her to come to campus via Zoom, then we would invite all students, faculty, and staff for that meeting. And it's great to meet the author of the books that we choose for One Book, One Campus.

00:06:00 **Sun**

Wow, that would be so exciting if we're able to hear from her. Could you talk a little bit more about kind of the vision of One Book, One Campus? What is it that you like about that idea of everyone reading the same book?

00:06:12 **Herschel**

The idea of reading the same book is sort of built into our mission statement and the idea of a shared reading experience.

00:06:20 **Herschel**

So, our mission statement is that we are a program designed to unite students, faculty, and staff around a shared reading experience, designed to promote discussion and understanding of issues in our campus community and beyond. The program incorporates curriculum and campus-wide activities that build unity and contribute towards achievement of the college's mission.

00:06:43 **Herschel**

So, I think one of the things that draws me to this is the idea that we often think that reading a book is a thing you do in an English class in college. But, I want to make sure we say that, although that might be true, reading is something that we do individually. But the experience we get from that reading is designed to be discussed and talked about, and you interact with other people around you in terms of what did you learn? What did you feel? How did you react? What does it make you think about?

00:07:16 **Herschel**

And especially a book like this designed to open our eyes to other cultures that might be different than ours, it would spark dialogue. And I think ultimately, when I say shared experience, I am referring to the idea of beginning a dialogue with the people around us. And I hope that is what this book will do.

00:07:36 **Sun**

I think there's something, so moving about that idea of a whole community reading the same book and having that opportunity to be in dialogue with each other. There's something very moving and compelling about that especially at this time in the history of our nation, in the history of our planet.

00:07:52 **Sun**

Can you talk a little bit more about how stories connect us, can bring us together, can help us learn about each other?

00:07:59 **Herschel**

Yeah, absolutely. I'm going to start with a quote by S. I Hayakawa. He said, " In a real sense, people who have read good literature have lived more than people who cannot or will not read. It is not true that we have only one life to live, if we can read, we can live as many more lives and as many kinds of lives as we wish."

00:08:22 **Herschel**

And I think that goes to the heart of what it means to have a shared reading experience and the books that we're choosing as our goals moving forward with One Book, One Campus, would be to pick books that speak to the issues of the world today and beyond.

00:08:42 **Herschel**

So, in choosing The House on Mango Street, we're talking about Sandra Cisneros who created a character named Esperanza Cordero, who is living in Chicago and in a world where during the time it was taking place, wouldn't have been seen as taking kindly to a young Hispanic girl in Chicago.

00:09:05 **Herschel**

At the time the book takes place, Chicago wasn't very diverse and I would say not very heavily populated by Hispanics. Today, it might be different, but when the book took place ... and that is what the spotlight is on.

00:09:17 **Herschel**

So, my point is that if we get to read a book about a person in a culture different than ours, it changes our perspective. And I think that's the key to picking and reading books that shift our view of the world.

00:09:31 **Herschel**

If we can see the world through Esperanza's eyes, then it allows us to see our little part of the universe slightly different as well.

00:09:40 **Herschel**

And the goal then would be to talk about what does that mean? What is Esperanza's experience in relation to ours? How was it the same? How is it different and what does all that mean? And if that starts that dialogue, that as you pointed out, we sort of need in society today, then the book did its job.

00:09:57 **Sun**

Thank you, that's really beautiful. I feel like there's a really strong correlation between the way that you're talking about a shared reading experience and what the experience of going to college is like for many people. It may be the first place where they've really had an opportunity to be in dialogue with, and learn about, and become friends with people who have really different life experiences and beliefs.

00:10:20 **Herschel**

Absolutely, and college can be seen as many things to different people, but I think, one goal of college is you read things you wouldn't have read otherwise. I think it's easy today to say that I'm just going to read what I want, but what about all the things that are not on your radar?

00:10:36 **Herschel**

And so going to college, and at least it is my experience both as a learner and an instructor, is that I got exposed to things I would've never known existed. And I'm hoping that when we pick books, we're picking ones that are able to reach all students and all faculty and all staff, but are also new to some of those individuals who wouldn't have read the book otherwise.

00:10:58 **Sun**

I really like that idea of the shared reading experience being something accessible as well. Often times when we think about reading, we're imagining like these thousand-page tomes that we had to get through in a week for a class when we were in high school or college.

00:11:11 **Sun**

So, can you talk a little bit about what should folks expect from The House on Mango Street? Our last One Book, One campus was a graphic novel, this is a little bit different.

00:11:21 **Herschel**

Oh, absolutely, to your point, I could imagine it backfiring if we picked a book that was 500 pages with very small print. Because the first thing a student would do ... and I will admit I did it when I was a student - the first thing I'd do is I look how long it is and how big is the font, and how long is the chapter so I know how to prepare myself to read.

00:11:39 **Herschel**

And if this is something students are doing because they want to, or because they're assigned in class, I could imagine some students will be turned off by a book that weighs five pounds in their backpack.

00:11:49 **Herschel**

So, House on Mango Street is great. As a counter to that, it is only roughly 110 pages. Each chapter is extremely short. I call them vignettes, they're little snippets of Esperanza's life in Chicago.

00:12:04 **Herschel**

So, in one chapter she's going to be talking about a neighbor, the next chapter is about her aunt. The next chapter is about a family pet. The next chapter is about an uncle, the next chapter is about her day in school.

00:12:15 **Herschel**

And it's a style of writing that basically allows the individual to read each chapter as its own tiny story. There's almost no plot to speak of in the traditional sense. So, when someone picks up the book the first time expecting a plot to run through every chapter, you might argue the only plot really is Esperanza.

00:12:36 **Herschel**

She is what ties the whole book together. Everything else is snippets of her life in Chicago, on the street she grew up on, and how she relates her entire upbringing to that house on Mango Street. And the house also becomes sort of the center, a character if you will, in its own right, that heavily influences her mentality growing up and what she would become as an adult.

00:13:01 **Herschel**

And I think that speaks highly of how we look at our house or our place where we grew up and how that can heavily influence us. And we're in a pandemic and we are some way stuck in our homes and maybe now more than ever, we should examine what that means. And what impact does our place of living have on our own personal narratives.

00:13:23 **Sun**

That sounds really accessible. I was just thinking, when you were talking about, as students, we might've been a little overwhelmed by a 500-page book, and I think most of us faculty would be at this point as well.

00:13:37 **Sun**

So, it sounds really accessible, a little bit over a hundred pages. And then a book that has the standalone chapter sounds perfect for our busy lives right now, when we're all wearing so many hats and maybe somebody's homeschooling their kids or helping them with remote learning, and they're teaching or they're going to school, or they're working. That sounds very manageable.

00:13:59 **Herschel**

Oh, exactly. And I think that speaks to both an instructor who wants to assign it and a student who's going to read it. So, an instructor might say, "I only want you to read these four chapters because this is our theme for the course that's being taught". Or a student might pick it up and read just a couple of chapters and still feel they're part of that shared reading experience. I think that's why a book like this really works for a One Book, One Campus agenda.

00:14:26 **Sun**

So, can you talk a little bit more about, everyone's invited to participate, the whole community. So what's your vision?

00:14:32 **Sun**

You've shared a little bit about faculty incorporating it in their courses or students just being able to jump in and read it. It doesn't necessarily have to be the whole book. How about for other folks? May be classified or managers, or maybe a student who's interested in reading it, but their teacher hasn't assigned it. How might they kind of find a way into the One Book, One Campus community?

00:14:54 **Herschel**

My goal would be to have a calendar of events. And on our Canvas shell, we have a button that will be a calendar when we have one. That a calendar would include, for example, Sandra Cisneros coming to campus via Zoom. It would include a discussion maybe put on by somebody in a department who's reading it. It could be a group activity run by a club on campus. But also, I would like to see a set of activities run by students. So, one thing that we were talking about doing is building a Canvas shell just for students. So, they can share their experiences.

00:15:32 **Herschel**

And I would love to see examples of artwork, photography, creative writing, poetry, any form of creative expression on campus that can be shared by everybody; students, faculty, and staff. I don't want to frame it as a contest.

00:15:48 **Herschel**

There's no contest involved, just a place to say, "Here's my home and I'm going to represent that in any way that I choose. And if it's a hand-drawn piece of art, a piece of clay, woodwork, metal molding, whatever they want to feel as an expression of themselves, I want that to have a place to be shared." Ultimately, the goal is that again, that shared experience and where we are from and how we represent our homes is part of the core of the book.

00:16:15 **Herschel**

So, I can see this being done by everybody. So there's no reason why a manager or someone in faculty or staff couldn't also share their experience at home or what they represent as home.

00:16:28 **Herschel**

And maybe to them, home is not the place they're currently living, but maybe where they're from originally. And maybe where they're from originally, like Esperanza, wasn't the most diverse place. And maybe that had an impact on them growing up and even impacts them today.

00:16:42 **Herschel**

So, all of this is a big ideal version of the program. Each step requires planning and getting a calendar. So, I hope to be doing that next few weeks. I hope to have the Canvas shell with an actual set of dates of events and then to build one for students. And that's sort of the plan going forward.

00:17:02 **Sun**

That sounds really amazing. I feel like this seems like it's really an ideal book for this time in our collective experience, both in providing readers with the opportunity to reflect on and think about their own sense of home, what it is that contributed to who they are today, those experiences, those people, those places. And then also the opportunity that creates for being in dialogue with each other, like you were saying, that's really lovely.

00:17:29 **Sun**

I was just thinking before we jumped on to our chat today that I haven't read The House on Mango Street since I was in college. So, it's been many years for me and I am looking forward to kind of cozying up and delving back into this book.

00:17:44 **Sun**

But it made me think about that we sometimes do have movies or books that we return to at different points in our lives for various reasons. And I was wondering if you could share a little bit about what's that process when we're kind of called back to a story, what maybe is the value in returning to a story or returning to a book at a different point in our lives?

00:18:09 **Herschel**

Oh, absolutely. I think there's great value in reading a book more than once at different points in an individual's life.

00:18:21 **Herschel**

So, I'll give you as an example, you said you read it in college. You're probably a different person now. If you are who you are based on a collection of experiences that have shaped you, then when you read it and the reason you read it, perhaps it was an assigned book in class ... and I will admit that I read books assigned to me differently than when I read books for fun. And I certainly read books differently when I'm older and when I know I'm reading it for a specific reason.

00:18:42 **Herschel**

So, I think when you take all that and put that together, I think that idea of that I'm different, the world is different, my interpretation will be different; there's a different way to approach the reading from when you start and you can certainly get a different interpretation when you're done.

00:18:59 **Herschel**

I do know a lot of the feedback about choosing House on Mango Street was that it is something that is commonly assigned in high school or other college classes long before we chose it for a book. So, it is a book that is not exactly new to the public.

00:19:15 **Herschel**

It's probably been a book that people have either read or maybe heard about in the past. And I think that's okay. I think that's fine to read a book in a class or as an assigned book in high school. But when you come to it from a fresh perspective, meaning that you're a student and you're at Mt. SAC for the first time and you pick up the book, how you read it will be different.

00:19:38 **Herschel**

And I think the same thing is true for faculty and staff who maybe read it when they were in school, maybe they assigned it when it first came out. I think the book is over 25-years - now. So, it's feasible that Mt. SAC instructors assigned the book 25 years ago.

00:19:52 **Herschel**

And so, I think coming back to it today, the world's different, we're different, the dialogue is different. How do we engage in some of that discussion? I think changes how we read. And I think that's absolutely great about a book is that ... what's the expression, books never die, right?

00:20:07 **Herschel**

Because no matter what, there's still something there to be gained from the reading. So, even if we've read it or we read it a long time ago, I think a second reading is worth it and can open up new ways to interpret and to absorb the information.

00:20:22 **Sun**

Well, I'm just about ready to go make a pot of tea and grab my blanket and start reading. I'm excited, I'm really looking forward to the opportunity to have a shared experience and to have those conversations on our campus community.

00:20:36 **Herschel**

I'm always open to ways to use the book in the classroom and/or as an activity on campus. So, when we're done, you all who look at the podcast should be able to see our link to the Canvas shell. I'm not going to read it here, it's got a bunch of numbers and letters in it.

00:20:55 **Herschel**

But once you're on the Canvas shell, you're going to find some fantastic resources. For example, there's a link to the library where you'll be able to get library resources. In addition, we have classroom resources; this includes in-class discussions, possible essay writing topics, creative activities, in-class projects, and many other things that might spark your desire to use the book in your classroom.

00:21:22 **Herschel**

We will also have a calendar of events and we also have discussion forums. And the discussion forums are very diverse, we have things just about curriculum, things about what works and what doesn't for classroom assignments, creative projects, even just a link about how are you using the book in your class.

00:21:40 **Herschel**

Even if it's something as, I'm just going to offer my students extra credit, great, like why? And what do you hope to get from that extra credit?

00:21:50 **Herschel**

This is something that is available on our Canvas page. And I hope all of you will link it in your dashboard and use it as a tool where you share what it is that you're doing with the book. How are you using it? And if you're not using it, what did you think of it? You can just talk about your own experience.

00:22:08 **Herschel**

The current Canvas page is only for Mt. SAC faculty and staff. However, the second one we build will be for students. So, we can have some of the same things for students there; how are they using the book? What are they getting from it? How are they seeing it as a shared experience?

00:22:23 **Herschel**

So, really, I don't want anyone to think, "Oh, Herschel Greenberg is in control of all this." And really I'm not, I'm more in charge of simply saying, "Let's just get this facilitated." And it's really up to the community to take ownership of the books that we are using in the One Book, One Campus program. And I hope to hear from some of you and how you're using the book, and what it means to you and what you think it means to your students.

00:22:46 **Sun**

That sounds really amazing. So, if folks have ideas, maybe somebody wants to host a discussion for their program or in their department, and if they want to collaborate with you on some ideas or they want maybe to collaborate with you on getting the word out, how can they reach out to you?

00:23:02 **Herschel**

The best way to reach out to me would be to go to the Canvas shell and use the inbox in Canvas or a discussion forum. You could also email me directly hgreenberg@mtsac .edu. And let's talk. And if you want to run a program, you pick a day and time that works for you, and what I'll do is I'll add it to the calendar.

00:23:28 **Herschel**

And then I can send an announcement to the Canvas shell so anybody who has it on their dashboard would know that this event is happening. And then I would also help you make a flyer or just email flyers, if that was something you wanted me to do, so we could get the word out.

00:23:42 **Sun**

That sounds really great. One of the ideas you were talking about was like a shared space for people if they wanted to share their art or their poetry or their short stories. Is that something that will be on both Canvas shells?

00:23:56 **Herschel**

Oh, absolutely. The nice thing about Canvas is that it's never set in stone. If someone says to me right now, they want that button, it'll take me five seconds to make it. So, soon. I will be happy to make that button right now.

00:24:06 **Sun**

Awesome, that sounds great. I just think it would be neat for faculty and classified and managers to have opportunity to share if they wanted to; their photography or their sculpture or their art or their poetry, that's inspired or comes out of their conversations from reading the book.

00:24:23 **Herschel**

Absolutely. And I would put it not necessarily in the discussion forum so it's buried, I'd put it right on top of the homepage, so that when anybody goes into the Canvas shell, they can immediately see, oh, there's a button of creative sharing. And let that be whatever it wants to be.

00:24:38 **Herschel**

And Canvas, of course, takes audio and video. So, if somebody is reading a poem or they're acting out an interpretation of the book or acting out an interpretation of their definition of home, Canvas can accommodate all that.

00:24:51 **Sun**

That sounds really great. Well, I want to thank you for all of your hard work and your passion and your dedication for getting One Book, One Campus off the ground again this year.

00:25:00 **Herschel**

So, just as last set of comments and reminders, there are books available on campus. So, if you are an instructor who would like to use it in the classroom, I have a way to get you books from the health center. And if you're an instructor or faculty or staff who is considering reading it, there's ways to get the book to you from POD.

00:25:21 **Herschel**

In addition, because of the pandemic, we also have multiple library e-Books that will be available very soon. I put in a request for a very large number so that multiple people can check it out at the same time. So, the goal would be is that I don't want anyone to feel they're obligated to go out and buy it when there are resources on campus to get a copy in your hand.

00:25:43 **Herschel**

And again, same thing for your class. If you don't want to make it a required purchase by your students, you're more than welcome to contact me and I'll be happy to do what I can to get you books to your classrooms so your students can use them.

00:25:55 **Sun**

That sounds really great. And we'll put resources in the show notes for this episode as well, so folks know how to access those resources.

00:26:02 **Sun**

I know you have put such an incredible amount of work into making One Book, One Campus happen for Mt. SAC, for the community, and I'm so grateful to you and I'm really looking forward to seeing what comes out of the conversation and the shared reading experience. So, thank you.

00:26:18 **Herschel**

Oh, no problem, I appreciate the opportunity to talk about the book. It is definitely a passion of mine and I think anybody who picks up the book will benefit from reading it and will thoroughly enjoy it. And like you, I can't wait to see what comes after.

00:26:33 **Sun**

Thanks for joining us on the podcast.

00:26:35 **Herschel**

Thank you Sun, I appreciate it.

00:26:39 **Christina**

Thank you for listening to the Magic Mountie Podcast. Remember to subscribe on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you like to get your podcasts, so you can listen in the car, in your office, or however you like to listen.

00:26:52 **Christina**

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