



Esperanza Rising

Post-Reading Response Prompts



After you finish reading *Esperanza Rising*, choose five of the following prompts to respond to.

<p>A.</p>	<p>Notice the names of the chapters in this book. What do they have in common? How are they important to the story?</p> <p>The chapter names, given in both Spanish and English, are all names of fruits or vegetables that are being harvested during the time period covered by the chapter. Overall, these chapter names show how Esperanza's life is governed by the changing harvests throughout the book. Beyond that, within each chapter, the named fruit or vegetable plays an important part in the events. For example, in "Las Guayabas (Guavas)," Esperanza hides in a hidden compartment of the wagon with Mama and Hortensia beneath a pile of green guavas. In addition, the first and last chapters are both named "Las Uvas (Grapes)," showing that a whole year has passed. In the last chapter, catching Abuelita up on all that has happened, Esperanza tells the story "as a field worker." Her year is measured by which crops are ripe and what must be done for the land.</p>
<p>B.</p>	<p>Esperanza and Papa share a deep love of the land. Describe the points in the story when Esperanza seeks to feel the heartbeat of the land. How is each one important? How are they different?</p> <p>First, in the prologue ("Aguascalientes, 1924"), Papa shows six-year-old Esperanza how, by lying down and listening quietly, they can feel and hear the valley's heartbeat. This scene shows how much love there is between Esperanza and her father, and how they share a strong love of their land.</p> <p>Later, in "Los Melones (Cantaloupes)," soon after she arrives in the United States, Esperanza lies down on the ground to try to hear the earth's heartbeat, as her father taught her. She is saddened, confused, and disappointed when she fails. Instead, she feels as if she is floating above the earth. She is frightened. This scene shows how she has lost her father and her land, the things that anchored her life.</p> <p>Then in the last chapter, Esperanza takes Miguel out to the foothills and shows him how to feel the earth's heartbeat, as her father had shown her. As they feel it together, Esperanza feels herself soaring above the earth again, but this time is different. Rather than disquieted, she feels hopeful about the future. Touching Miguel's hand, she feels secure in his friendship.</p>
<p>C.</p>	<p>How is the zigzag crocheted blanket important to the story and the characters? Give specific examples from the text to support your answer.</p> <p>The blanket connects Esperanza with Abuelita, even when they are separated. On the night that Papa dies, Abuelita teaches Esperanza to crochet the zigzag stitch. Abuelita weaves a strand of her hair into the blanket, saying that this means her love and good wishes will be in the blanket forever. Abuelita's lessons go beyond crochet, as she unravels Esperanza's crooked first zigzag stitches and advises her not to be afraid to start over. When Esperanza leaves her home, Abuelita gives her the blanket, telling her to finish it.</p> <p>Later in the camp, Esperanza remembers Abuelita saying that after they lived through many hills and valleys, they would be together again. Esperanza works on the blanket all through her mother's illness. By the time Mama is better and Abuelita finally joins them, Esperanza has created a gigantic blanket big enough for three beds. Finishing the blanket, she weaves in a strand of her hair to preserve the happiness she feels then. The zigzags in the blanket represent life's ups and downs, the connection between the generations, and hope for the future.</p>



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D.	<p><i>Esperanza</i> is the Spanish word for hope. How does the title <i>Esperanza Rising</i> relate to the story?</p> <p>At times, Esperanza feels hopeless. She goes through terrible losses. But her mother reminds Esperanza that they have a choice in how they will live in the United States—together and unhappy, or together and happy. Gradually, Esperanza realizes that there is hope for a happy future. She finds the strength to keep going for Mama's sake. She also comes through for Isabel, helping her to hang on to her hope even in the face of the injustice of being passed over for an award because of her brown skin. And Esperanza's final words about being ready to begin again show that she has found hope for the future.</p>
E.	<p>In Mexico, Esperanza tells Miguel that he and she live on opposite sides of a deep river that they cannot cross. How does this divide between them affect Miguel's attitude in the United States? Does this change by the end of the book? Explain.</p> <p>Miguel sees the United States as a place where he can overcome the “peasant” station that he was born into in Mexico. He tells Esperanza that in the U.S., he can work hard and stop being a second-class citizen. In California he believes he will not always be stuck on the “poor” side of the river. By the end of the book, Esperanza sees Miguel more as an equal. When they go out to see the sunrise together, she sees a vision of the two of them on the same side of a great river.</p>
F.	<p>How does Esperanza's attitude about the strikers change, and why? Give specific examples from the story to support your answer.</p> <p>At first, like others in her camp, Esperanza disagrees with the strikers and doesn't want them to cause trouble. She is afraid and desperate to keep her job so she can take care of her mother. But when she and Miguel give a ride to Marta and her mother, Esperanza sees the poor conditions in the strikers' camp. She gives food (and a piñata) to a hungry family. Though she still disagrees with their methods, she sees them as people in need.</p> <p>Then, when Marta is hiding, Esperanza helps her. She is compelled by knowing how close Marta and her mother are. Esperanza sees that the situation is more complex and that the strikers are doing what they believe is right. By the end of the book, Esperanza is seeing some of the unjust treatment more clearly. It seems she might be starting to agree with some of the strikers' values.</p>
G.	<p>How does the friendship between Miguel and Esperanza change from the beginning to the end of the story?</p> <p>They grow up as the closest of friends until Esperanza tells Miguel how they can't cross “the river,” or the social divide between them. Miguel resents being treated as a second-class citizen and he and Esperanza grow distant. But in the United States, things start to shift. Esperanza is no longer wealthy and no longer the boss's daughter. Miguel begins to follow his dream of working on the railroad, and he is happy that he can improve his life in California. His positivity in the face of Esperanza's problems leads to a major argument. But in the end, Miguel shows his courage and cleverness and his love for Esperanza by bringing her what she wants most of all—her Abuelita. Esperanza realizes how much she values his friendship and love. She starts to see that they are on the same side of “the river.”</p>



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<p>H.</p>	<p>How is Esperanza's vision for her future different at the end of the book than it is at the beginning of it?</p> <p>In Mexico, Esperanza has a limited view of her future. She and her wealthy friends love to talk about their <i>quinceañeras</i>, the big parties they will have when they turn 15. For the girls in their class, the path is clear: marry eligible landowners' sons and take their mothers' places as <i>patronas</i> of large estates.</p> <p>After she loses her father, her home, and her money and moves to California, Esperanza must work hard to survive and take care of her mother. She learns that she can be happy being poor as long as she has the people she cares about most with her. She learns that she is capable and smart and strong. She realizes that in the United States, her possibilities are unlimited. Despite the problems in the U.S., she sees herself learning English and going on to have a happy life with her loved ones around her.</p>
<p>I.</p>	<p>Over the course of the book, how does Esperanza's sense of home change? What is important to her about her home in Mexico? What matters most to her about her home in the camp?</p> <p>In Mexico, Esperanza loves her pretty things. She loves having other people take care of her. She also loves the land her father owns. She watches others take care of the land. Then, everything collapses, and she must leave. She struggles to accept that the camp in California is her new home, telling herself that she will be rich once again.</p> <p>At the end of the story, when Abuelita first enters the cabin in the camp, Esperanza is worried that she will think it's shabby. But the things in that room are precious to Esperanza—Isabel's pictures, the babies' toys, the roses that have grown from the roots taken from Mexico. They remind her of what matters most—the people she loves. She comes to realize that even though she has lost her many beautiful things, home is being with the people she loves the most.</p>
<p>J.</p>	<p>How does Esperanza's understanding of social issues, such as race, class, justice, and equality, change over the course of the story?</p> <p>In Mexico, young Esperanza accepts the fact that her family is wealthy and others are not. She does not question why people with lighter skin and more Spanish blood are the landowners and bosses, while darker-skinned people, descendants of the indigenous peoples of Mexico, are laborers. She is surprised when Miguel points this out to her.</p> <p>While on the train, Esperanza is not compassionate towards the woman begging at the station. She can't understand why Carmen, the "egg woman" who has so little, would give money to her. Later on, Esperanza gains an understanding of the issues of racism and poverty and develops greater empathy. When she visits the strikers' camp, her reaction to the hungry family is immediately to give them food. She wants to help those in need.</p> <p>In California, Esperanza becomes aware that, in the U.S., all Mexicans are seen as a single group and that many white Americans believe Mexicans are suited only for physically demanding, low-paying work. She is upset when Isabel is passed over for the "Queen of the May" honor because she is Mexican. When she hears the "Okies" will live in camps with greater comforts than the Mexican camps, she is angry at the injustice. She becomes more sympathetic to the goals of the strikers and is determined to succeed despite the barriers.</p>