



Esperanza Rising

Discussion Guide #3



Encourage critical thinking and support your students' literacy development by asking questions during reading. Here are some questions you can ask your readers to engage them in a discussion.

CHAPTERS: Las Ciruelas (Plums) – Las Papas (Potatoes)

Comprehension:

- What happens during Esperanza's first day taking care of the babies on her own?
Esperanza makes the mistake of feeding raw plums to the babies, so they get sick. She feels guilty and worried. Then, she figures out how to help them feel better by feeding them rice water. She also burns the beans, but not too badly. Everyone eats them and doesn't complain.
- How does the dust storm affect Esperanza, the workers in the sheds and fields, and the strikers?
The storm surprises Esperanza, but she stays safely in the cabin with Irene, Melina, and the babies while the storm rages. She worries about the others. The women in the shed are stuck until the trucks can find them. They arrive home covered in dust. The men from the fields are even more thoroughly coated with dirt. The adults are coughing from the dirt in their mouths and lungs. The dirt covers the cotton plants in the fields where the workers are planning to strike. There is no strike, but the workers lose their jobs anyway because they can't work.
- Why doesn't Mama want to call a doctor?
She doesn't want to pay for a doctor, and she likely doesn't want to worry the others.
- Mama gets Valley Fever. What is that? What causes it, and how does the news affect Esperanza?
Valley Fever is a lung infection caused by breathing in spores (from fungus) carried by the dust of the valley. In severe cases, it can cause high fever, coughing, joint pain, rash, and fatigue. The doctor explains that Mama has a very serious case. He says there is medicine, but that "if she survives," it might take many months to recover. Esperanza is scared that Mama might not survive.
- What does Esperanza believe Mama needs in order to get well?
Esperanza believes that Mama needs Abuelita. She feels that since her mother is depressed, the happiness of being with Abuelita could help Mama get better.
- Why does Esperanza want to work?
Esperanza wants to earn money to pay for Abuelita to travel to them. This is what she thinks she can do to help her mother get well.
- Marta's aunt talks to the women about repatriation. What is this?
Marta's aunt tells them about the American program to round up people of Mexican heritage and send them involuntarily from the United States to Mexico. Under the program, people who "look Mexican" are sent to Mexico, even Mexican Americans who are U.S. citizens and may never have been to Mexico before.
- As Esperanza reminisces about past Christmases, what does she realize?
Esperanza realizes her life in Mexico feels impossibly far away, like a fairy tale. She also realizes that what she wants this year is different from all the prior years: she wants her mother to get well, to have continued employment, and to have soft hands after all the work she has been doing.



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CHAPTERS: Las Ciruelas (Plums) – Las Papas (Potatoes)

Text Analysis:

- Mama asks for Abuelita's blanket. How is this moment significant?

Mama reminds Esperanza about the blanket, which has been stored away. When Esperanza takes the blanket out, it reminds her of Abuelita and their past. Mama holds the blanket to her chest, taking comfort in the memories of Abuelita. Then Esperanza remembers Abuelita telling her to finish the blanket and to take care of Mama. So, she starts crocheting, finally beginning to fulfill her promise to Abuelita. She keeps on crocheting and taking care of Mama.


- Esperanza and Isabel make many yarn dolls together. What realization does Esperanza have watching Isabel with the dolls? What do the yarn dolls represent for Esperanza?

The little handmade dolls make Isabel very happy. Seeing this, Esperanza wishes that she had so few worries that a simple yarn doll could make her happy. The yarn dolls represent her poverty (because they're so different from the dolls Papa gave her) and happiness in simplicity.

- At the end of "Las Papas," Esperanza tells Mama that she will be *la patrona* for the family now. What is the significance of this statement?

Esperanza is saying she will be the head of their family now and take care of her mother. Earlier in the book, Esperanza would dream of her *quinceañera*, or fifteenth birthday celebration, followed by marriage to a wealthy landowner's son, when she would become *la patrona* of a fine estate. But in their new circumstances, being *la patrona* means Esperanza is taking on the job of caring for Mama.

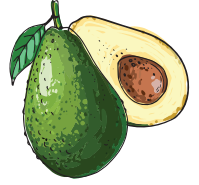
Personal Connection:

-  With Mama ill, Esperanza must begin acting as the head of her family. Think of a time when you took on a new responsibility. How did that make you feel? What did you like and dislike about it?

Student answers will vary.



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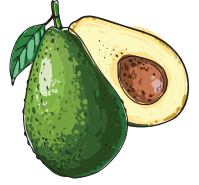
CHAPTERS: Los Aguacates (Avocados) – Los Espárragos (Asparagus)

Comprehension:

- Why does Esperanza put avocado on her hands? Why does she fix her mother's hair in the hospital? How are these two gestures similar?
Esperanza wants the avocado mixture to soften her work-hardened hands. To Esperanza, it is a reminder of Mama and their old life, because it's something Mama did in Mexico after gardening. It is a way to take care of herself and maintain her dignity and sense of pride in her appearance.
When Esperanza sees Mama's bedraggled hair in the hospital, she is moved to make it better. She brushes, braids, and pins it the way that Mama used to wear it. Esperanza wants her mother to look more like her old self. She hopes that cleaning up her hair will make Mama feel better.
The gestures are similar because they're both efforts to improve appearances, to connect to their old life, and to feel better.
- What does Miguel tell Esperanza about how Mexicans are thought of and treated?
Miguel says that shop owners treat Mexicans badly and that some believe all Mexicans are uneducated and unskilled.
- What does it mean when Miguel says that Mr. Yakota "is getting rich on other people's bad manners"?
Mr. Yakota owns and runs a Japanese market, but he also stocks many of the foods that Mexicans prefer to eat, and he treats the people well. As a result, the Mexican workers shop at his market. He is making more money because the other shop owners are rude to the Mexican workers.
- How does meeting Marta with her mother change Esperanza's feelings about Marta?
Esperanza sees how close Marta and her mother are, which shows Esperanza that she and Marta have something in common. Esperanza has a similarly close relationship with Mama. Esperanza is surprised and pleased when Marta's mother kindly says she is praying for Mama to get well. When Esperanza sees the camp where Marta and her mother are living with other strikers, she begins to understand that Marta is sincere in her desire to improve conditions for all the workers and willing to make sacrifices to achieve her goal.
- What does Esperanza do when she sees the hungry family at the strikers' camp?
She gives some of her beans to the father who is hungry. Then, seeing how miserable the children are, she gives them the piñata she bought for her mother.
- What does Marta tell Miguel and Esperanza about the strikers' plans?
Marta warns them that in a few weeks, during the asparagus harvest, the strikers will shut things down and disrupt the farm operations. She says they'll be in danger if they don't join the strikers.
- What motivates Esperanza to help Marta during the immigration sweep?
Esperanza is terrified when the raid starts, afraid she could be deported to Mexico. So when she sees Marta hiding, she realizes how scary it is for her. Knowing how close Marta and her mother are, Esperanza doesn't want them to be separated. She also believes it would be wrong for them to be sent to Mexico, since they're U.S. citizens.



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Comprehension (continued):

- Why do the police and immigration officials round up only the strikers and not Esperanza and the other women who are working?

The raid is intended to protect the growers and remove those who are disrupting the harvest. The growers need the workers like Esperanza, so the company guards protect them. The government believes that the strikers want to form a farmworkers' union, and government officials oppose the idea, so they are getting rid of the strikers.

Text Analysis:

- Different people in Esperanza's camp respond to the strike in various ways. Choose two characters with different reactions. What are their responses to the strike?

Esperanza grows in understanding and sympathy. Miguel is practical and sees an opportunity to benefit from the strike. Hortensia seems frightened that someone will be hurt. Alfonso hopes that the company will keep them safe and take care of them.

- Why does the author describe the piñata after the strikers' camp is raided?

The piñata has been destroyed along with the rest of the camp. Seeing the destruction, Esperanza remembers how the strikers wanted to make things better. Her gift, given to bring joy to people who were suffering, is broken. By including this detail, the author highlights the larger destruction of the camp and of people's dreams.

Personal Connection:

- Think about Marta's arguments for a strike, and those of Esperanza and the people in her camp against striking. Would you strike? Why or why not?

Student answers will vary.