



Esperanza Rising

Discussion Guide #4



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: Los Duraznos (Peaches) – Las Uvas (Grapes)

Comprehension:

- How does Esperanza feel about Isabel's desire to be crowned Queen of the May?

Esperanza sympathizes with Isabel and believes she should win if her grades are the best. But she worries that Isabel won't be chosen, simply because she's Mexican American, and the teacher always chooses a blonde, blue-eyed girl for Queen of the May. This fact makes her sad and angry.

- What causes Esperanza's temper to erupt?

Esperanza realizes the many different ways that Mexicans are treated unfairly in America, and she gets angry. She learns that the farm owner is building a new camp for workers from Oklahoma and that it will be nicer than theirs, with inside toilets, hot water, and a pool (which the Mexican workers can only swim in once a week right before it's cleaned). Then Miguel says he has been pushed out of his railroad machine shop job by untrained men from Oklahoma. The Mexicans are sent to dig ditches and lay tracks instead. She sees the injustice and doesn't like that Miguel isn't fighting it.

- How do Miguel and Esperanza differ in their reactions to the discrimination that they face as Mexicans?

Miguel is more patient. He is willing to put up with bad treatment because he still believes that he can build a better life in the U.S. In Mexico, he would always be a second-class citizen, while in the U.S. he has a chance to become more than that. He believes good things will happen, as he explains to Esperanza with a quote from her father: "Wait a little while and the fruit will fall into your hand."

Esperanza feels impatient and angry at the injustices faced by her community. She focuses on all that she has lost: her orderly, comfortable, wealthy existence. She is losing hope for the future and is angry with Miguel for his optimism.

- Why doesn't Esperanza tell anyone about the conversation she has with Miguel before he leaves?

Esperanza feels responsible for Miguel leaving and ashamed that she yelled at him. She believes he has left because he is angry at her for telling him to stop being foolishly hopeful.

- How does Esperanza convince Isabel to accept the gift of her doll?

Esperanza persuades Isabel that Papa would have wanted Isabel to have it. She also says she is too old for dolls herself and that Isabel will be doing her a favor if she takes the doll and loves it.

- When Abuelita arrives, why does Esperanza want to show her the blanket? Why does she finish it that same night?

The blanket represents Esperanza's connection with Abuelita and her promise to take care of her mother. Importantly, Abuelita told Esperanza to finish the blanket, and so Esperanza wants to show her that she has been adding to it, keeping her promise (and making an enormous blanket as a result) through all the ups and downs. The night of Abuelita's arrival, Esperanza finally adds the finishing stitches, because now they're all together again—at the top of the "mountain."



Esperanza Rising

Discussion Guide #4



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: Los Duraznos (Peaches) – Las Uvas (Grapes)


Comprehension (Continued):

- How does Esperanza measure time when she tells Abuelita about their eventful year?
She measures time like a fieldworker, based on the crops that were being harvested or planted when each event occurred. For example, Mama got sick at the end of the grapes and went to the hospital during potatoes.
- The author calls both the first chapter and the last “Las Uvas.” Why? What details from the first chapter are repeated or reflected in the final chapter?
This repetition shows how Esperanza has come full circle. A year has passed and her birthday is here again. The grapes are once again ripe and ready to harvest, first in Mexico, and now in California. And Abuelita’s blanket, which was started in the first chapter, is completed in the last.

Text Analysis:

- How are Isabel's situation with the Queen of the May and Miguel's situation at the railroad similar?
In both cases, they lose something important to them because of prejudice and discrimination against Mexicans. The Queen of the May is an honor apparently given only to white girls, even when a child who is not white has better grades.
When the white men from Oklahoma arrive, despite their lack of qualifications, the railroad decides to train them and push Miguel out of a job he does well. In both cases, white people are given preferential treatment even though they are less qualified.
- Just before her birthday, Esperanza and Miguel go out to the foothills to see the sunrise. What happens on this outing, and why is it significant?
Esperanza wants to try to hear the heartbeat of the land again, which she does successfully! Like before, Esperanza feels herself floating up in the sky. But, unlike the earlier incident when she felt out of control and unmoored, now Esperanza feels happy and free. She feels grounded and connected to her loved ones. She also feels hope for the future as she envisions the exciting possibilities. She even has a vision of Miguel and herself on the same side of a great river, rather than separated by status. This experience is opposite from her first, showing that she is connected and rooted in this new land.

Personal Connection:

-  Many well-known stories are “rags-to-riches,” but Esperanza's story is the reverse—she goes from riches to rags. Which version is more appealing to you? Why?
Student answers will vary.



Esperanza Rising



Discussion Guide #4

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.

CHAPTER: Author's Note

Questions:

- How is *Esperanza Rising* similar to and different from the author's grandmother's life?
The Esperanza in the story and the real Esperanza both grew up on large ranches in Aguascalientes, Mexico, to parents named Sixto and Ramona. They both lost their fathers and immigrated to California to live and work in company farm camps during the 1930s.
Unlike the Esperanza in the story, the real Esperanza was married when she moved to California, and she raised her first three daughters at the farm camp.
- Why do you think Pam Muñoz Ryan changed details about her grandmother's story when writing this novel?
She didn't have all of the details of her grandmother's story, so she had to invent some details. Since the author writes books for children, she probably wanted the protagonist to be younger than her grandmother was when she immigrated to California. She may have also changed some details to make the story work better as a novel.
- How did the author's own personal experiences impact the novel?
Pam Muñoz Ryan was raised in the San Joaquin Valley of California and always had fresh fruits, vegetables, and nuts from the nearby farms. Her descriptions of the fruits and the harvests, as well as the landscapes, were all informed by her own experiences growing up in the region.
- Why do you think Pam Muñoz Ryan included the author's note? Why did she put it at the end rather than at the beginning of the novel?
She probably wanted readers to know that the story was inspired by her own grandmother's life. She clearly admired her grandmother and wanted to tell a version of her story. She may have put the note at the end of the story rather than the beginning so that readers wouldn't be confused by the fictional parts of the novel.
- Knowing this book is inspired by a real person and place in time, does it impact your thoughts or feelings about the story? Why or why not?
Student answers will vary.
- After reading this novel, what new information have you learned about Mexico and California in the 1930s? What questions do you still have?
Student answers will vary.