

# Esperanza Rising

By Pam Muñoz Ryan

Esperanza begins her life as the privileged daughter of a wealthy ranch owner in Mexico. Her life is forever changed when tragedy strikes her family, and she and her mother must flee to the United States. With little money or possessions, Esperanza finds herself in a land rife with poverty, desperation and depression. However, with the love of family and friends and the will to work hard and not give up, Esperanza conquers the mountains and valleys that life presents her.

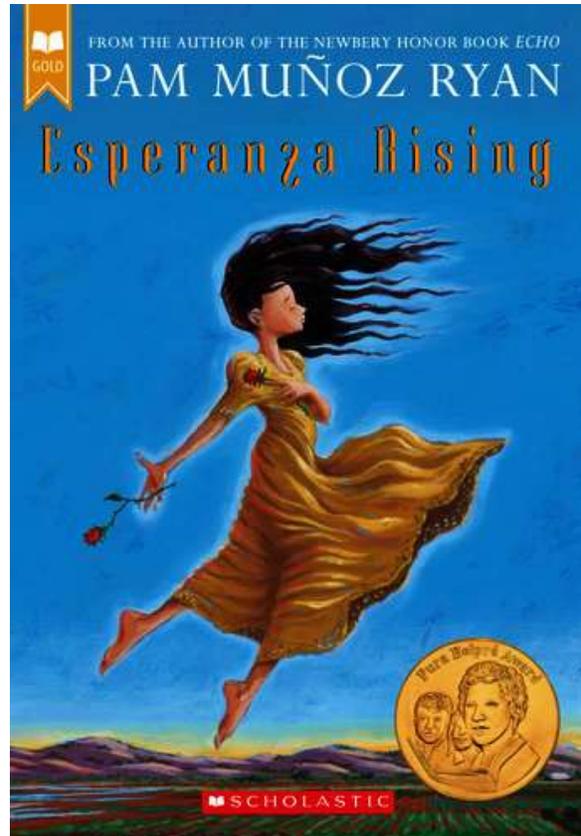
You will find yourself immersed in this inspiring tale of a girl who loses the things she treasures most but finds her true self in the process.

## About the Author

Pam Muñoz Ryan has written many books for children and young adults. She wrote *Esperanza Rising* in 2000 to tell the story of her Mexican grandmother's journey and life in America during the Great Depression. The novel won the Pura Belpré medal in 2002. Some of her other well-known works include *Echo*, *When Marian Sang*, *Riding Freedom*, and *Painting the Wind*. She currently resides near San Diego, California with her husband.

## Getting Started

You can find *Esperanza Rising* at your local or school library, or at local or online bookstores. It's also available as an ebook.



## While You're Reading

Every good story is full of captivating characters, timeless and timely themes, significant settings, pivotal plot points, and vivid vocabulary that combine to engage our brains and our hearts. In this section of the website, you will find activities that invite you to dig deeper into each of these literary elements for a better understanding and enjoyment of the book.

To aid your investigation, save our “Writing While You Read” guide (see pages 19 and 20), with helpful tips on keeping a reading journal and annotating a book while you read.

**Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read (or re-read!) Part 1 of *Esperanza Rising*:**

- The key way a writer helps his or her readers connect with a story is through its characters. Which qualities, behaviors, and choices do you think make some characters more appealing than others? To help you answer this question with specific evidence from the book, use the Character Grid you'll find on pages 21 and 22 below (and you can make extra copies of page 22 if you need them). Tuck it inside your book, and, each time you meet a new character, take a minute to jot down the name and your initial observations about him or her on your Character Grid. Be sure to revisit your Grid every few chapters or so, too! There may be more ideas you want to add as you get to know each character better.
- 
- At the beginning of the book, six-year-old Esperanza is among the grape vines with her father. He tells her that the earth is alive and that you can hear its heartbeat if you listen closely. Esperanza is unable to hear the beating beneath the earth and her father tells her: “Wait a little while and the fruit will fall into your hand. You must be patient, Esperanza” (2).
    - Why do you think Esperanza’s father wants her to listen for the heartbeat of the earth?
    - What does Esperanza’s father mean by “the fruit will fall into her hand?”
    - Why is patience so important? Give examples of how patience is shown in the book.

- The author of *Esperanza Rising*, Pam Muñoz Ryan, organizes the book into chapters that are titles with the name of the produce that is harvested during that time of the year.
  - Why do you think she chose to structure the book this way? What do the titles help you understand as a reader?
  - Why do you think she wrote the chapter titles in Spanish and then translated into English in small print below?
- The author describes the crowd of workers who have gathered for the grape harvest at El Rancho de la Rosas: “They were covered top to bottom in long sleeved shirts, baggy pants... and bandanas wrapped around their foreheads and necks to protect them from the sun, dust and spiders. Esperanza, on the other hand, wore a light silk dress that stopped above her summer boots, and no hat” (5).
  - What does the author want you to understand when she contrasts the way Esperanza is dressed and the way the Vaqueros are dressed?
  - How is Esperanza’s life different from the life of the workers on the ranch?

- “Papá had promised to meet her in the garden and he never disappointed her .... Darkness would settle quickly and a feeling of uneasiness and worry nagged at her. Where was Papá?” (8-9).

This is an example of foreshadowing in the story. Authors often use foreshadowing to give the reader clues about what will happen later in the story.

- Why do you think that the author uses foreshadowing at this point in the story?
- What clues is the author giving you about what might happen later in the story?
- How does this quote build suspense and make you want to continue reading?
- In the story, Esperanza says she understands that “Miguel [is] the housekeeper’s son and she [is] the ranch owner’s daughter and between them [runs] a deep river” (18).
  - What do you think the “river” represents to Esperanza in the story?
  - Later when Miguel talks of going to the United States he says, “You were right, Esperanza. In México we stand on different sides of the river” (37). Does Miguel think it will be different in the U.S.? Why or why not?
- Pam Muñoz Ryan describes Tío Luis and Tío Marco as “la calabaza, the squash plant in Alfonso’s garden, whose giant leaves spread out, encroaching upon anything smaller” (28-29).
  - What do you think the author means by this?
  - Give examples of what the uncles do to “encroach” upon Esperanza and her family.

- As Esperanza struggles to sweep the wooden platform at the camp, “A group of women [are] laughing at her. And in the middle of the group [is] Marta, pointing. ‘*La Cenicienta!* Cinderella!’ She laugh[s]. Burning with humiliation, Esperanza drop[s] the broom and [runs] back to the cabin” (112).
  - Why does Marta treat Esperanza in such a cruel way?
  - How is Esperanza like Cinderella from the fairy tale?
  - Why is Esperanza embarrassed by Marta and the other women laughing at her?

**Respond to the following prompts in your reading journal as you read (or re-read!) Part 2 of *Esperanza Rising*:**

- Esperanza compares her mother’s illness to a valley, wondering, “[Will] she ever escape this valley she [is] living in? This valley of Mamá being sick?”(160).  
  
How is Esperanza’s life in the United States like mountains and valleys? Give specific examples (other than Mama’s illness) of the ups and downs Esperanza experiences.
- Compare and contrast Esperanza’s character with Marta’s character. Draw a Venn diagram (see pages 23 and 24 below) in your journal to help you describe the similarities and differences between these two characters.
- As the family discusses the farm worker strike, Miguel tells his father that more and more people are coming to the area. “Some of them say they will pick cotton for five and six cents a pound, and will pick produce for less. People cannot survive on such low wages” (203).
  - Why are people willing to come and work for less than what other people are making?
  - What does the father think about these people? Should he be worried about their presence? Why or Why not?
- At the end of the strike, immigration officials take many of the strikers away from the farms to deport them back to Mexico. However, Marta manages to evade the officials and hide. Despite their history, Esperanza brings Marta an apron and helps her disguise herself as a worker (209).
  - Why is Esperanza willing to help Marta?
  - What do Esperanza’s actions tell us about her as a character?
  - Would you have helped Marta if you were in Esperanza’s position? Why or why not?
- The day after Esperanza helps Marta, she visits the strikers’ farm. The land has been abandoned but the piñata she had given the children is still hanging from a tree, “its tissue streamers fluttering in the breeze. It had been beaten with a stick, its insides torn out” (213).
  - Why do you think the author includes this image of the piñata?
  - What does the piñata represent or symbolize in the story?

- When Isabel does not win the Queen of May because she isn't white, Esperanza consoles her by saying: "Isabel, it does not matter who won. Yes you would have made a beautiful queen, but that would have lasted for only one day. A day goes by fast, Isabel. And then it is over" (227).
  - What does Esperanza want Isabel to learn from this experience?
  - Why is it so special that Esperanza gives Isabel her doll?
- At the beginning of Esperanza's journey to the United States, she has a difficult time letting go of the privilege she had in Mexico. However, over time she becomes less selfish and begins sacrificing her happiness and providing comfort for her family and friends.

Give at least three examples from the story that show how Esperanza has changed. Explain your thinking.



## Getting to the Root



English is a living language. It changes and grows all the time. One of the best ways to understand the history of the English language and to unlock the meanings of unfamiliar words is to learn Latin and Greek word parts. As you study biology, you will learn more and more of these word parts, and once you know them, you will begin to recognize them in all kinds of words—and you'll find that your knowledge of those word parts will help you decipher the meanings of unfamiliar words.

Roots are the "base" of plants, and Latin and Greek roots form the base of many English words. For example, the Latin root *audi* means "to hear." How many modern English words can you think of that include the root *audi*?

Next, take a look at each word part below. Beside each part is a word from *Esperanza Rising* containing that word part. You can find the word in context on the page number in parentheses.

- **soph** – philosophical (13)
- **dol** – condolences (26)
- **du** – duplicates (49)
- **spir** – perspiration (88)
- **vari** – various (121)
- **sep** - antiseptic (231)

1. Can you determine the meaning of the root from your knowledge of the word beside it?
2. If not, think of other words that you know that also contain that root. What do those words have in common? Based on that common element, can you figure out the meaning of the root?
3. If you're still stumped, check out this [list of Latin and Greek roots](#).
4. Now that you know the meaning of the root, how many words can you generate that use the root?
5. Once you understand the meaning of the root, you'll find that even your understanding and appreciation of familiar words will deepen and grow when you think about how that root works in those words.

## Words, Words, Words

*Esperanza Rising* is full of great words. Below is a list of some of the words from the book that may be unfamiliar to you, along with the page number on which each word appears in the story. Be sure to follow the steps below for other words in the book that are new to you.

- scythe (4)
- premonition (9)
- indignation (30)
- correspondence (51)
- valise (69)
- hillock (95)
- anticipating (104)
- suede (152)
- spores (155)
- listless (161)
- grotto (164, 214)
- repatriation (170)
- anguish (208)
- irrigation (220)
- cacophony (250)

**Before you look these words up in a dictionary**—or ask someone what they mean—try working through the following steps:

1. Generate a list of other words that share one or more of the same word parts. What do the words on the list have in common? Are there any clues from those commonalities that you can use to help figure out the meaning of the unknown word? Hint: Some word parts—as they appear in English words—have multiple meanings as we look back at the Latin and Greek, in part because of changes that have occurred in the words over the years. For example, does the "ped-" in "pedestrian" mean the same thing as the "ped" in "pediatrician"? Where there is possible confusion, or when you don't see familiar word parts, context clues (see step 2) are extremely important.
2. Go back and reread the word in its context. This context includes the sentence in which you find the word, but you should also read one or two sentences both before and after the appearance of the word. What context clues do you find that might unlock the meaning of the word for you?
3. Make your best guess at the meaning of the word.
4. Look up the definition in [a dictionary](#). Be sure to also look for information about the word's origin. This information will often contain the Latin or Greek word from which the word is derived.
5. How close was your guess?

## Explore

Our world is full of connections—between people, places, and events. In this section of the website, you will find activities that uncover some important connections—in history, meteorology, climate science, epidemiology, and mythology — between *Esperanza Rising* and our world.

### **The Immigrant Experience During the Great Depression**

Esperanza comes to the United States during one of the most dire times in our history. The Great Depression was caused by a collapse of the financial system and weather that particularly devastated agricultural industries throughout the country. Life was extraordinarily difficult for most people in the country. However, many Mexican Americans and other people of color were treated even worse during the Depression. The strikes and stories of racism presented in the novel were all inspired by true events that happened during the 1930s in the Central Valley of California.

Explore the resources below to better understand the important events that were occurring during the same time period of the book.

- Learn about the history of The Great Depression on [this webpage that includes facts, a quiz, a crossword puzzle, and a word search](#).
- Examine an [article and images of Mexican immigrant workers during the Great depression](#).
- [Watch a short video](#) to learn more about the process of repatriation of Mexican Americans during the 1930s.
- Discover why and how many U.S. Citizens were unlawfully deported during the 1930s in this [article](#) about Mexican repatriation.
- [Listen to an interview](#) with author, historian, and professor Francisco Balderrama about the history of Mexican Repatriation in the United States.



### **Reflection Questions**

- Why is repatriation considered to be contrary to American ideals?
- Why do you think it was important for Pam Muñoz Ryan to tell the story of Esperanza?

- If you read one of our earlier book-club selections, *Hidden Figures*, what connections can you make between the experiences of women in that book and the experiences of characters in *Esperanza Rising*?

## The Storms that Cause the Fever



In the novel, a dust storm hits the farm where Esperanza and her mother live. Esperanza watches as the storm approaches: “Thousands of acres of tilled soil [are] becoming food for *la tormenta* and the sky [is] turning into a brown swirling fog” (148). The storm doesn’t only bring dust and dirt, but it also brings sickness. Esperanza’s mother quickly becomes very ill with Valley Fever. Check out the resources below to learn more

about how dust storms form and how these storms cause people to be infected with Valley Fever.

- [Watch this video to learn about the basics of Valley Fever.](#)
- Discover the history of Valley Fever [in this article from the California county in which Esperanza’s story was set.](#)
- [Learn the answers to basic questions about Sandstorms \(Dust storms\).](#)
- Get a sense of how a dust storm forms [in this video from the weather channel.](#)
- [Find out why more dust storms have been occurring](#) in the Southwest over the last few years.
- [Explore the connections between climate change and Valley Fever](#) in the present-day United States.

### Reflection Questions

- Based on what you have learned about Valley Fever, why do you think Esperanza’s mother was infected with Valley Fever and Esperanza was not?
- Why have the number of cases of Valley Fever risen in the last few years?

## Dig Up Information on Farming in California

The fertile soil of central California provides the setting for Esperanza's story. Without farming and the agriculture industry, many people would not have migrated to this area. Discover more about farming in California with the resources below.

- [Read a short passage and test your knowledge](#) about the history of farming in California.
- Check out this [harvest calendar](#) to discover when crops grow and are harvested in California.
- [Discover what farming was like during The Great Depression in this short video.](#)
- [Learn about the current agriculture industry of the Central Valley of California](#) (where the majority of the story took place) and how it provides the majority of produce that America eats.
- [Explore this interactive map of California agriculture in 1920.](#) (You need Flash for this website. Make sure to click the arrows so that the symbols show up on the map.)



### Reflection Questions

- Using the harvest calendar above, in what month would each chapter have occurred in the novel?
- How is the Central Valley of California important to America and how we eat?
- What would be the potential consequences if the Central Valley again began to experience dust storms like those in the book?

## Rising from the Ashes

Symbolism is a type of figurative language that authors use to help the reader find more meaning and feeling in their writing. The mythical figure of the phoenix is a symbol of rebirth that is often seen in literature and popular culture. In *Esperanza Rising*, Abuelita says “We are like the phoenix...Rising again, with a new life ahead of us” (50). Let’s find out more about this amazing symbol!

- Watch a [slideshow and read an article](#) to learn facts about the mythological symbol of the phoenix.
- Explore more about the phoenix through this [article and set of activities](#).
- Discover the different [variations of the phoenix myth in this article](#).
- Have fun creating the image of a phoenix with [this online jigsaw puzzle](#).
- Read a version of [The Story of the Phoenix](#).



### Reflection Questions

- In what ways is the character of Esperanza like the phoenix from the myths you have researched?
- Why do you think the image of the Phoenix is so often used in literature, movies, comics and other forms of popular culture?
- Where else in contemporary culture have you seen the Phoenix used as a symbol of rebirth?

## Create

An important part of learning is having the chance to produce something of your own. Here you will find engaging projects that connect with the novel and that allow your creative abilities to shine.

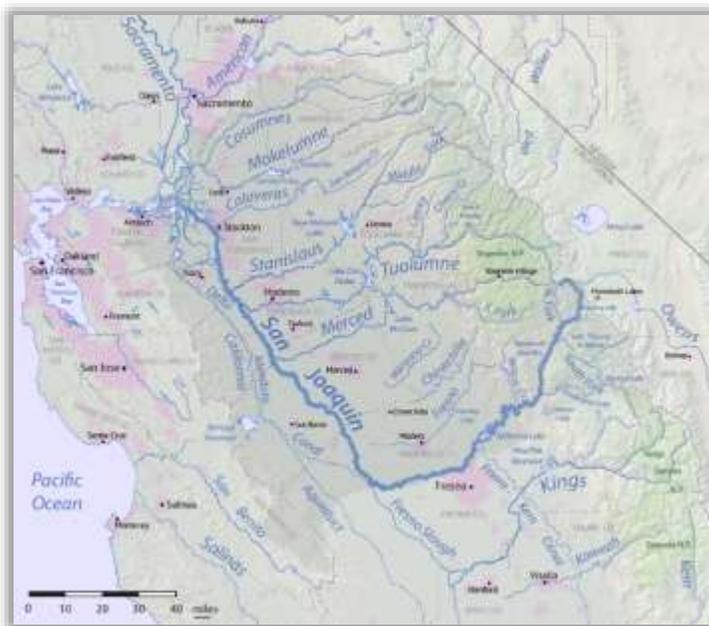
### Map It!

In order to escape her vengeful uncles, Esperanza and her mother travel from Mexico to the United States. Create a map that tracks her journey from the grapevines of Aguascalientes to the farms of Arvin, California.

Follow these steps to create your map:

1. Go to [Google maps](#).
2. Select the menu in the upper-left corner - the icon is three horizontal lines and it's beside the "Search Google Maps" bar.
3. Select "Your places" > "MAPS."
4. Select "SEE ALL YOUR MAPS" - this should open a new tab.
5. Choose the menu in the upper-left corner - the icon is three horizontal lines and it's beside the "GoogleMy Maps" heading.
6. Choose "Create a New Map."
7. Give the map a title
8. Mark the following places that Esperanza and her mother went through on their way to Arvin:

- Aguascalientes
- Zacatecas (65)
- Mexicali (81)
- Los Angeles, CA (85)
- Highway 99 (93)
- Arvin, CA



9. Print the map you have made.
10. Add a key to mark the types of transportation (wagon, train, truck, etc...) they used on each part of the trip.
11. Share your map with a family member or friend and explain the significance of each location in the story.

## Sing Me a Song

Mexican Ballads called Corridos were sung often during the Great Depression. See an example of a [Corrido's lyrics from the Great Depression here.](#)

Create the lyrics to your own song or Corrido that tells Esperanza's story. Be sure to include the following:

- the title of your song;
- at least 10 lines (you can repeat a chorus) that tell a story;
- lyrics that reflect the mood and feeling that Esperanza had during the novel;
- symbols or imagery from the book; and
- lyrics that have rhythm and rhyme (optional).

You can share just your lyrics, or you can put your song to music and perform it for family and friends.



## Book Review

Others' opinions of books can often help us decide if we want to read a particular text. A book review is one way for readers to share their thoughts about a book they've read.

Your task is to create a book review of *Esperanza Rising* that encourages others to read the book. Your review could be a video, slide show, or a poster advertisement. Make sure to include the following:

- the book's title and author, and an image of the book for your audience;
- an explanation of what type(s) of reader will enjoy your book;
- a short summary of the book (Do NOT give away the ending, but entice a reader to pick your book up!);
- three key elements that make this book really stand out;
- information about your favorite scene:
  - Select a tiny excerpt of the book that reveals something enticing about your book.
  - State the page number where a reader would find the excerpt.

- If you're creating a video, use a good read-aloud voice.
- Wrap up your review by telling what you think the author's message is to readers of the book.

Your product should show evidence of accuracy, as well as thoughtful work that will make others want to read the book. Sell the book! If you enjoy this activity, ask a parent or other trusted adult to help you go to a site like [DOGObooks](https://www.dogobooks.com) and post your review. You could also create reviews for other books you have read.



## **Reflect & Connect Prompts**

In Duke TIP's online Book Club, the "Reflect & Connect" prompts provide an opportunity for students to share their ideas about the book with other Duke TIP students. You may choose to record your responses to these questions in your Reading Journal, or you can use them to talk about the book with friends or classmates who have also read it.

### **Complex Abuelita**

Esperanza describes her grandmother as someone who "might host a group of ladies for a formal tea in the afternoon, then after they had gone, be found wandering barefoot in the grapes, with a book in her hand, quoting poetry to the birds" (13).

- What do you learn about the character of Abuelita from this description?
- The strong contrast in Abuelita's behavior shows that she is a complex and rich character. Think about someone in your family that you are close to. How might you see a similarly strong contrast in their behaviors?

### **Different Perspectives**

When Esperanza refuses to let the little girl on the train play with her doll, Mamá scolds Esperanza saying, "When you scorn these people, you scorn Miguel, Hortnesia, and Alfonso. And you embarrass me and yourself. As difficult as it is to accept, our lives are different now" (70).

- What does the doll mean to Esperanza? Why does she value it so much?
- Why do you think Esperanza is so reluctant to let the girl play with her doll?
- Do you think that Esperanza's mom is right to scold her? Why or why not?
- What does Mamá want Esperanza to understand about their new life?

### **Reading Rainbow**

On the way to the farm camp in Arvin, Isabella shares with Esperanza what she knows about their new home. She explains that it is much bigger than the tent camp they lived in previously; it has electricity and running water, among other things. However these are not the aspects she is most excited about. "Isabella lean[s] toward Esperanza and grin[s] as if she were telling her a big secret. 'And a school. Next week, I get to go to school, and I will learn to read'" (89).

- Why is Isabella so excited about learning English and how to read?
- How would your life be different if you didn't have these skills at age 8?

### **The Plight of a Cat**

The night of the *jamaica*, the party at the farm camp, Esperanza witnesses Marta and a man arguing about whether the workers should strike. Marta compares the workers to a small kitten, "This is what we are! ... Small, meek animals. And that is how they treat us because we don't speak up." A man in the crowd responds, "Maybe all that cat wants to do is feed his family. Maybe it doesn't care what all the

other cats are doing” (132). Marta and the man represent the different sides of the argument between the workers. One side wants a better life for themselves and others in their community. The other side just wants to survive and take care of their families.

- Which side do you agree with? Explain your thinking.
- Do you agree with Esperanza’s decision not to strike? Why or why not?
- If you lived during this time period, what would you do in Esperanza’s situation?

### **Injustice of Racism**

Esperanza becomes increasingly infuriated by the racism that she and other people of color experience in the camps. She finally explodes, telling Miguel: “Is this the better life that you left Mexico for? Is it? Nothing is right here! ... They send people back to Mexico even if they don’t belong there, just for speaking up. We live in a horse stall. And none of this bothers you?” (221).

- How would you feel if you were treated unfairly and unjustly, based only on the color of your skin?
- What are other examples in the text of ways that Mexican Americans were victims of prejudice or racism?
- We know that Esperanza’s life is much harder in the United States, but how has Miguel’s life changed? Do you think it is harder or easier? Give examples from the text to support your thinking.

### **Miguel’s Secret Mission**

The choices characters make tell us a lot about who they are. After Miguel and Esperanza fight, he disappears from the camp with all of the money that Esperanza had saved. When he returns, he brings her Abuelita with him. “He [says] that Ramona and Esperanza [need] her” (246). He risks everything to bring Esperanza what she truly needs.

- Do you agree with Miguel’s choice to go on a mission to bring Abuelita to the United States? Why or why not?
- Why does Miguel leave and take the money without telling anyone?
- Why do you think he didn’t at least leave a note?
- What would you have done in this situation?

## **The Courage to Start Over**

Throughout the story, Esperanza struggles to finish crocheting the blanket Abuelita started with her. Before Esperanza leaves Mexico, Abuelita unravels Esperanza's rows of yarn and says, "Do not be afraid to start over" (15). The story ends with Esperanza saying the same thing to a frustrated Isabel: "Esperanza smile[s] and reache[s] over and gently pull[s] the yarn...she look[s] into Isabel's trusting eyes and sa[ys], 'Do not ever be afraid to start over'" (253).

- Why do you think the author repeats this phrase in the novel? What does she want the reader to understand?
- Give examples of times in your life when you have had to be willing to start over. What did you learn from these experiences?

## **The True Story of Esperanza**

At the end of the novel, Pam Muñoz Ryan includes an author's note. This section details the story of her grandmother, the real Esperanza, who had experiences similar to those of the character in the story. Ryan writes, "When I was a young girl, Grandma used to tell me what her life was like when she first came to the United States from Mexico" (255).

- Why do you think the author includes this note at the end of the novel?
- What parts of the novel were the same as Ryan's grandmother's real life and what parts were different?
- In what ways did the author's note change your perspective of Esperanza's story?
- The last line of the author's note reads, "It is no wonder that in Spanish, *esperanza* means 'hope'" (262). What are examples of the idea of hope in the novel?

## Keep Reading

### A few thoughts on books and reading...

"When I have a little money, I buy books; and if I have any left, I buy food and clothes."—Erasmus

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."—Dr. Seuss

"Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog it's too dark to read."—Groucho Marx



### What's next?

We hope that you enjoyed reading *Esperanza Rising*, by Pam Muñoz Ryan. Check your email for information about our next book club selection. In the meantime, if you are looking for a new best friend—and aren't inside a dog—here are some books you might enjoy. Don't forget to use the tips from “Writing While You Read” (see pages 19 and 20) to deepen your enjoyment and understanding of these books too.

- *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*, by Robert C. O'Brien
- *Rasco and the Rats of NIMH*, by Jane Leslie Conly
- *All Four Stars*, by Tara Dairman
- *The Stars of Summer*, by Tara Dairman (sequel to *All Four Stars*)
- *The Tell-Tale Start* and other books in “The Misadventures of Edgar & Allan Poe” series by Gordon McAlpine
- *Masterminds*, by Gordon Korman
- *My Near-Death Adventures*, by Alison DeCamp
- *The Scavengers*, by Michael Perry
- *A Single Shard*, by Linda Sue Park
- *The Island of Dr. Libris*, by Chris Grabenstein
- *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library*, by Chris Grabenstein
- *The Lost Kingdom*, by Matthew J. Kirby
- *Flora & Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures*, by Kate DiCamillo
- *The House of Power*, by Patrick Carman
- *Rivers of Fire*, by Patrick Carman
- *The Dark Planet*, by Patrick Carman
- *The Phantom Tollbooth*, by Norton Juster
- *Navigating Early*, by Clare Vanderpool
- *The Apothecary*, by Maile Meloy
- *The Apprentices*, by Maile Meloy (sequel to *The Apothecary*)
- *The City of Ember*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The People of Sparks*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Prophet of Yonwood*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Diamond of Darkhold*, by Jeanne DuPrau
- *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, by Trenton Lee Stewart
- *Chasing Vermeer*, by Blue Balliett
- *The Lightning Thief*, by Rick Riordan
- *Fever 1793*, by Laurie Halse Anderson
- *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, by Brian Selznick



## Writing While You Read

Have you ever read every word on a page, and turned every page, but when you finished reading, you couldn't remember anything that you had read? If so, you're not alone! Reading can be relaxing, but sometimes we make the mistake of thinking that reading is passive, when it should be active. This doesn't mean you need to run while reading – that might not be a good idea. Writing as you read, however, makes reading active. This process involves some effort, but the payoff for that effort is a deeper understanding and greater enjoyment of the books that you read.

Two strategies for being an active reader are keeping a reading journal and annotating your books.

### How do I keep a reading journal?

Below are some suggestions of things that you might write in your reading journal. Experiment with them. You may find that one strategy works really well for you, while others don't work at all. There's really not a right or wrong way to keep a reading journal, as long as you use it as a place to explore your thoughts, reactions, and questions as you read.

#### What Do I Write?

**Write a brief summary**, in your own words, at the end of each chapter or section. Include the main ideas or concepts of the chapter, major events in the plot, and any new information that you learn in the chapter.

**Do you meet a new character?** If so, what is the character like? How do you know? What are the reasons behind what that character says and does? How is the character like other characters in the book? How is the character different? Does this new character remind you of characters you've read about in other books?

**Does the setting change?** If so, how does the new setting compare and contrast with the previous one? Why does the setting change?

**Create your own title** for the chapter. If the book includes chapter titles, you might write about why the author has chosen that particular title for the chapter. How does it relate to the main ideas or concepts, major events, and character action in the chapter?

**Respond to the chapter.** What is the most interesting thing in the chapter? What did you learn that you didn't know before? Do you agree or disagree with the choices the author is making about plot and character? Why or why not? What do you think is going to happen next? How can you connect what is happening in the book to other things you've read? To other things you know? To your own experience?

**Identify words that you don't know.** Some of these words may just be new to you; others may be jargon, terminology that is used in a particular field or academic discipline. Look these words up in a dictionary, write down their definitions in your notebook, and be sure you understand their meanings and how the author is using them. Often these words are some of the most important in the reading.

**Make note of passages** where you are confused and/or have questions, and be sure to include a page number. Once you finish the chapter, you can return to the passages. Perhaps further reading clarified the confusion. If not, you know exactly which points in the text to further research or to ask questions about.

**Write down striking or unusual use of language.** Often writers use particular words, expressions, or sentences in ways that we wouldn't have thought to use them, and the effect can really jump off the page at us. If you come across a passage that seems really cool to you, write it down in your reading journal.



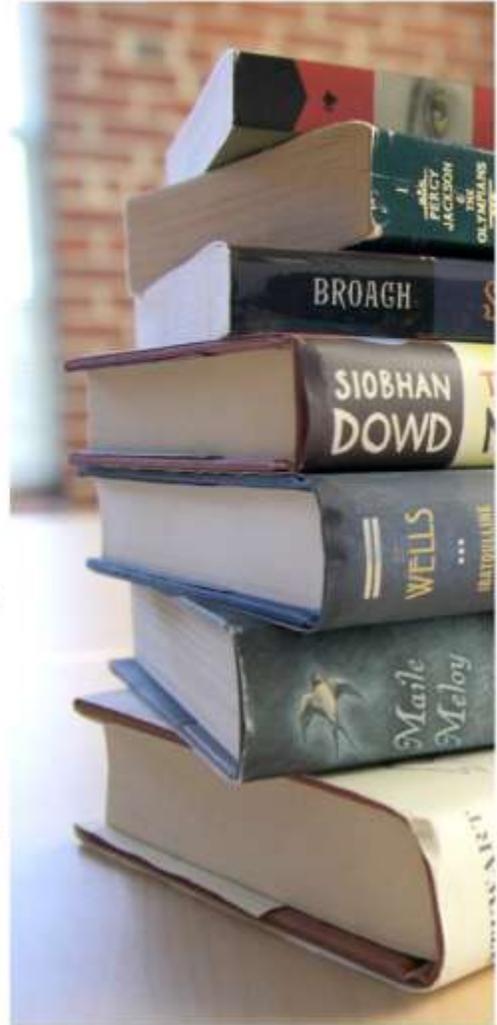
Throughout the online book club activities, you will find activities that are specifically labeled "Reading Journal." When you see that label, read the writing prompt, and respond to it in your reading journal. These prompts will usually ask you to write about a personal connection to what you've been reading. For example, a journal prompt might ask you to write about a time when you found yourself in a situation that is similar to a situation of one of the characters in the book.

### To Write or To Type, That is the Question!

Your reading journal doesn't have to be a hard-copy, hand-written one, but there are some advantages to using an old-fashioned journal:

- The physical act of writing promotes a stronger memory for new words, phrases, and strategies you will be learning
- The hard copy notebook can evolve into a collage, a scrapbook, even a work of art that represents your creative, messy, overflowing mind!

How and where you keep a reading journal is much less important than actually doing it! So find an old notebook that may be buried in your desk, ask mom or dad if you can buy an inexpensive composition book, or create a new folder on your home computer and get started!!



## How do I annotate a book?

As the word suggests, annotating a book involves making notes or other types of marks that help you focus on particular words or passages that seem important, are often repeated, relate to other things you've read, or simply interest you as a reader. An active reader annotates a text by doing any or all of the following:

### UNDERLINING

Specific words that convey significant events or elements of the story's characters, plot or theme

### VERTICAL LINE ALONG THE MARGIN

This helps the reader quickly find an important passage underlined, or to highlight a paragraph or other section too long to underline.

### \* ASTERISK/STAR/DOODLE ☆

Placed in the margin, this device is reserved for the most important, special ideas, events or elements of the book. There would be no more than a dozen of these in the entire book; by flipping through, one could easily find once again the most significant passages in the text.

### 4. NUMBERS

Placing numbers in the margin can help count a set of related points or ideas the author is listing.

### P.#32 PAGE NUMBERS

Often indicated by "p. #" or "Cf. #" next to the number, this indicates an idea or element is connected to another on different page of the book, and should be considered together.

### CIRCLES

These serve the same function as underlining key words or phrases, but may be reserved for the BIGGEST ideas or facts in the book.

Of course, all of these strategies involve marking in the book. So if you're planning on annotating your book, we recommend that you have your own copy – librarians take a very dim view of writing in books that belong to the media center/library!



## Names, Places, & Faces...Oh, My!

### Keeping Track with a Character Grid

When reading a new book, it can be helpful to keep track of the characters you meet and what you think about them. This Character Grid is one way to do just that!

Characters in books (or movies!) are often very like people you meet every day in real life. You may notice the way a character dresses, talks, thinks, behaves, or makes new friends. As you record your ongoing thoughts here, remember that some characters will change and grow depending on what happens to them—or whom they meet—as the story progresses. These are called **dynamic** characters. On the other hand, some characters stay the same no matter what happens to them. These are called **static** characters. Whether a character is willing to change and grow can affect the kind of person he or she turns out to be in the end, and it can also influence how we, as readers, feel about that character.

For example, Marlin, from the movie *Finding Nemo*, starts out as an overprotective dad who doesn't believe his son Nemo should try new things because he might get hurt. As the movie progresses, though, Marlin makes new friends, like Crush and Dory, who help him learn to guide and encourage his son without keeping him from experiencing the fun life has to offer. By the end of the movie, Marlin has changed his way of thinking about how to be a "good" dad. This not only makes him a dynamic character but also makes us like him better and want him to succeed as a parent. (If Marlin had not changed his ways, we might have ended up being frustrated by him.)

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

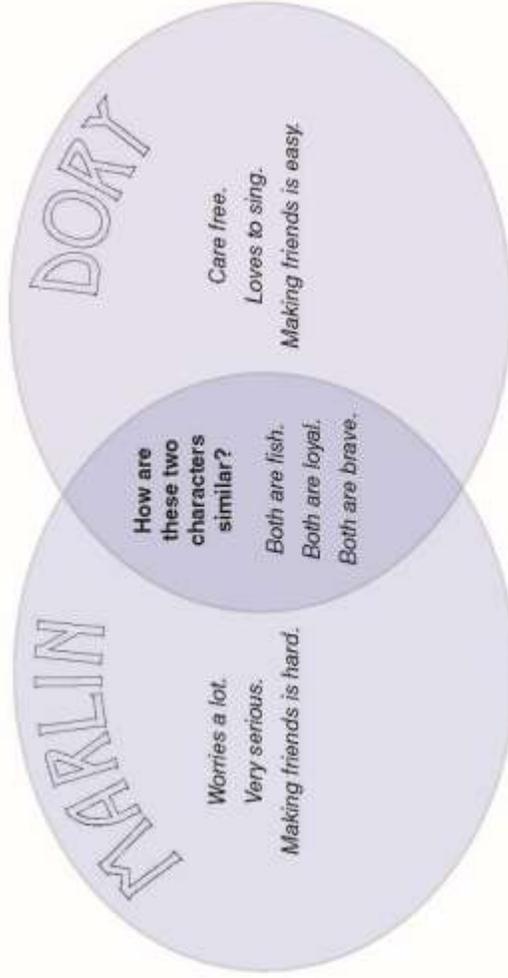
1. Tuck this Character Grid into your book or Reading Journal. Then, each time you meet a new character in the book, take a moment to write down his or her name on the grid and answer the "As You Are Reading" questions. (If you run out of writing room, feel free to create your own grid or answer these questions in your Reading Journal!)
2. Once you have finished the book, go back through your grid and answer the "After You Have Finished the Book" questions. As a way of wrapping up, consider: With which character(s) did you connect most strongly? What does this tell you about yourself?

Character's Name	As You Are Reading...		After You Have Finished the Book...	
	Where/When do you meet this character?	Describe this character's appearance and behavior.	What stands out to you about this character's name, behavior, or choices?	Why is this character important to the story overall?
			Is this character <b>static</b> or <b>dynamic</b> ? What evidence from the book tells you so?	

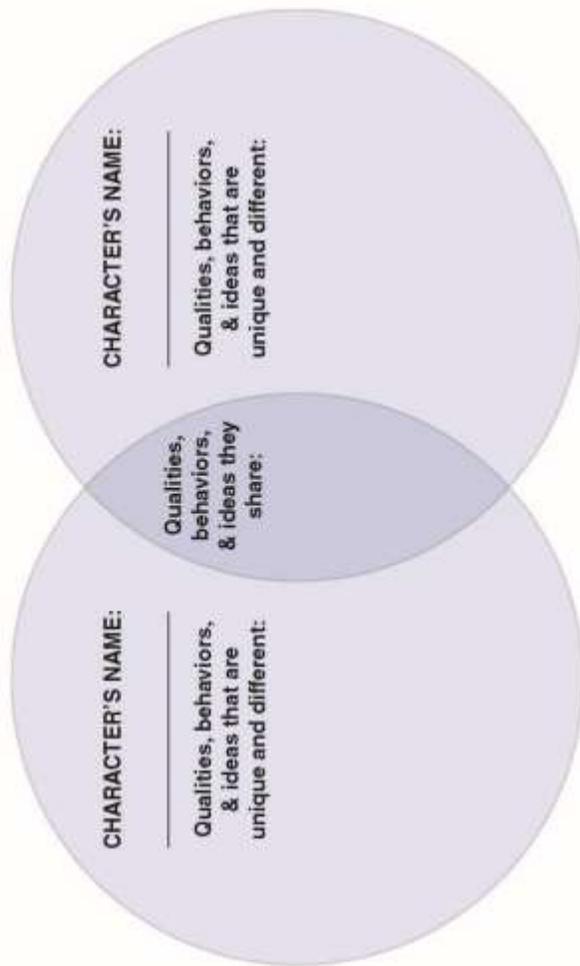
### Side-By-Side Comparison with a Venn Diagram

Creating a Venn Diagram can help you visualize and make sense of the similarities and differences between two or more things. For example, as you are reading a book, you could use a Venn Diagram to compare key characters, places, or events.

A basic Venn Diagram is made up of two, partially overlapping circles. Let's say you wanted to compare two characters. In the outer part of each circle, you would write one character's name and list the qualities, behaviors, and ideas that make him or her unique and different. In the space where the circles overlap, write down characteristics the characters share. If we were comparing Marlin and Dory, from the movie *Finding Nemo*, here is how our Venn Diagram might look. (If you've seen this movie, try adding some observations of your own!):



Now you are ready to draw your own Venn Diagram in your Reading Journal! To get started, try something like this:



If you want to compare more than two characters, places, or events, simply add additional circles to your Venn Diagram. Be creative! Just pay attention to the places where your circles overlap and look for similarities there. Here are some other possibilities:

