

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Esperanza Rising

by  
Pam Muñoz Ryan

### Book Information

Pam Muñoz Ryan, Esperanza Rising  
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Interest Level: MG

Esperanza and her mother are forced to leave their life of wealth and privilege in Mexico to work in the labor camps of Southern California on the eve of the Great Depression.

**Award:** Americas Award for Children's Literature; Jane Addams Book Award/Honor Books; Jefferson Cup Award/Honor; Judy Lopez Memorial Award...Children's Literature; NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts; Publishers Weekly Best Book; Pura Belpre Award/Honor Book; Smithsonian's Notable Book; YALSA Top Ten

**Topics:** History, Depression Era America; People, Mexican; People, Mexican American; People, Migrant Workers; Recommended Reading, Children's Literature Choice; Recommended Reading, IRA/CBC Choice; Recommended Reading, Junior Library Guild Selection; Recommended Reading, NCSS/CBC Notable Social Studies; Recommended Reading, YALSA Best Books for YA; Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks; U.S. States/Regions, California

### Main Characters

Abuelita Esperanza's grandmother on her mother's side

Alfonso the foreman on the Ortega ranch; Hortensia's husband and Miguel's father

Esperanza Ortega a pampered Mexican girl who loses her father and home and moves to California, where she must work in order to survive

Hortensia the housekeeper of the Ortega family; Alfonso's wife and Miguel's mother

Isabel Juan and Josefina's daughter

Josefina Juan's wife

Juan Alfonso's brother who lives in California

Marta a migrant worker who believes in fighting for better working conditions

Miguel Alfonso and Hortensia's sixteen-year-old son and a worker on the Ortega ranch

Pepe and Lupe twin babies belonging to Juan and Josefina

Ramona Ortega Esperanza's mother, whom Esperanza calls Mama

Sixto Ortega Esperanza's father, whom Esperanza calls Papa; a wealthy Mexican rancher who is murdered

Tío Luis Papa's older stepbrother; a bank president

Tío Marco Papa's older stepbrother; the mayor of the town

### Vocabulary

**clutching** holding or holding on to tightly; grasping firmly

**convent** a place where women in a religious order live; a nunnery

**escorted** went with; accompanied in order to lead, guide, protect, or show respect

**frail** physically weak; easily broken, damaged, or injured; fragile; delicate; neither strong nor durable nor stable

**gratefully** with thanks or appreciation

**horizon** the line where the ground and sky appear to meet

**perspiration** sweat; the salty moisture given off through the pores of the skin, often due to heat or exertion

**routine** a regular or usual way of doing something; a regular course of action or procedure; an unchanging, habitual process

**valise** a small bag or case used for traveling; a travel bag; a small piece of luggage

**wealthy** rich or well-off; affluent; having an abundant supply of money or possessions

### Synopsis

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The story begins on a prosperous ranch in Mexico, where the wealthy owner, Sixto Ortega and his wife, Ramona, live with their daughter, Esperanza, and Ramona's mother, Abuelita. The night before Esperanza's thirteenth birthday, her father is murdered. Although the house and grapes belong to Esperanza and her mother, the land is left to Esperanza's cruel uncle Tío Luis, a banker. Tío Luis offers to buy the house from Esperanza's mother for much less than it is worth. When she refuses, he proposes that she marry him after an appropriate amount of time has passed. She again refuses, and he tells her she will regret her decision.

That night, the family wakes to find the house on fire. Everyone escapes, but Abuelita's ankle is hurt. The house, the grapevines, and Papa's beautiful rose garden are burned. Tío Luis arrives the next day to repeat his proposal, saying that harm could come to the servants if Esperanza's mother doesn't rethink his offer of marriage. Mama tells Tío Luis that she will marry him in order to stall him until she and Esperanza can escape from Mexico. Abuelita must stay behind because of her injured ankle.

Mama and Esperanza escape to the United States with the help of their foreman, Alfonzo, his wife, Hortensia, and their son, Miguel. They arrive in California in the midst of the Great Depression. Because she has been pampered, Esperanza finds the living conditions and the work on the farm where they live very difficult. She cares for the babies and cleans while the others work in the fields. She has to learn to do many things she has never done before.

One day, a terrible dust storm occurs. As a result, Mama becomes very ill and is hospitalized. Esperanza begins doing adult work to earn money to pay the medical bills and to bring Abuelita to the United States to help Mama get better. During this time, some migrant workers strike, and things become dangerous for Esperanza and the other workers. Esperanza and her friends also experience discrimination as Mexicans in the United States.

Mama is finally well enough to leave the hospital. Miguel helps Abuelita leave Mexico and come to

California. Esperanza in the end becomes more optimistic about her new life and realizes she can have happiness without material wealth.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Literary Analysis

Why might the author have given the chapters of the book the names of different crops?

*The lives of the characters revolved around the crops that were being harvested. The characters spent most of their time working in the fields and measured time in terms of the harvest.*

### Inferential Comprehension

How might the lives of Esperanza and Mama have been different if Mama had married Tío Luis?

*Answers will vary but could include the following: Their house would not have burned down; Alfonso, Hortensia, and Miguel would have left the ranch, leaving Mama and Esperanza without allies; Esperanza would have been sent to boarding school; Mama would have been unhappy with the way Tío Luis treated her.*

## Teachable Skills

### Understanding Characterization

### Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors

### Comparing and Contrasting

### Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning