

PS 39 Diversity and Inclusion Book of the Month: November

Theme: Native American Heritage

Book Title: Esperanza Rising
By Pam Muñoz Ryan

Grade Level: 4th / 5th

Book Summary:

Esperanza thought she'd always live a privileged life on her family's ranch in Mexico. She'd always have fancy dresses, a beautiful home filled with servants, and Mama, Papa, and Abuelita to care for her. But a sudden tragedy forces Esperanza and Mama to flee to California and settle in a Mexican farm labor camp. Esperanza isn't ready for the hard work, financial struggles brought on by the Great Depression, or lack of acceptance she now faces. When Mama gets sick and a strike for better working conditions threatens to uproot their new life, Esperanza must find a way to rise above her difficult circumstances-because Mama's life, and her own, depend on it.

Discussion Questions:

- What does Esperanza mean when she tells Miguel that there is a deep river that runs between them? Did that ever change?
- How are Tio Luis and Tio Marco different from Esperanza's Papa?
- On the train Esperanza won't let the peasant girl touch her doll, yet later she gives the doll to Isabel. Why did she change?
- Describe Esperanza's feelings about Marta. Do her feelings about Marta ever change? Why or why not?
- How is Esperanza's life different in Mexico and in America? How is her life the same?
- Why do they shop at Mr. Yakota's store? What does Alfonso mean when he says that Mr. Yakota is getting rich on other people's bad manners?
- Why does the author name each chapter for a fruit or vegetable?
- How much control does Esperanza have over her life? What does she have control over?
- Who was most helpful to Esperanza?
- Esperanza liked her grandmother's scent of face powder, garlic, and peppermint. Do you have a special aroma that brings back memories?
- What part of the story was the saddest?
- Did anything in the story make you angry?
- Did something in the story make you smile?
- When she arrives, Esperanza finds comfort in finding ways that America is like her home. Have you ever been in a strange place and done the same?
- Isobel shows Esperanza the camps where people of different ethnic backgrounds live. She says, "We all live separate and work separate. They don't mix us." What did you think about that?