



Esperanza Rising

by Lynne Alvarez
adapted from the book by Pam Muñoz Ryan
directed by Rebecca Lynn Brown
A WORLD PREMIERE

MOST
ENJOYED BY
8+

This is the story of what it means to be uprooted, transplanted and regrown in alien soil. Mariachis (roving troubadours in glittering black sombreros) carry the tale from one place to another and are the bridge between cultures. Almost like a Greek chorus, they follow Esperanza, a young girl whose name means, “hope.” Brought up in the lush and beautiful world of the Mexican aristocracy and then torn away and replanted in the impoverished world of a migrant labor camp in California, circa 1930, Esperanza is a jubilant tribute to hope.

• A SYNOPSIS OF THE STORY •

Sixto, Esperanza's father is a wealthy landowner, respected by the workers on his ranch, Rancho Las Tres Rosas. But that doesn't save him from the anger burning against the upper class in Mexico. When he is killed in a raid by bandits, his land goes to his older brother, Luis, an ambitious banker who immediately makes it clear that Esperanza and Ramona, her mother, will be allowed to stay in their home only if Ramona consents to marry him. Mother and daughter formulate a plan to escape. Ramona tells Luis that she must spend one year in a convent before she can consider marriage. This will buy them some time, and meanwhile Esperanza will cross the border with two family servants, Hortensia and her son, Miguel. Esperanza enters her new life with no luxuries from her past - except her beautiful doll.

In California the immigrants find a place with relatives where they can live and work in a migrant labor camp, picking whatever

fruit is in season. Esperanza is miserable. The conditions are barely liveable. She has none of the skills she needs. However, Isabel, a young cousin of Miguel's, teaches her to care for the babies whose parents are harvesting in the fields, and gradually she learns to cope. In fact, she finds a way to earn a bit of money and collects it, hidden away in her doll case, hoping to bring her mother into the country. Nothing comes easily in this place. Marta, a young Chicana organizer, is working for better conditions and urges a strike, but strikes are broken by poor whites, “okies,” travelling across country in order to survive. Even Esperanza's precious money is stolen.

In the end, though, Esperanza thrives. She gives her doll to Isabel because it is what she has to comfort a friend, and her mother joins her in California. The roses, which Miguel has carefully smuggled from their home, flourish, and we are left believing that so will Esperanza.



Things to **imagine**, think about and do

There is a dividing line that cuts through the center of this play. It divides two countries, two cultures, two languages, and the past from the future as neatly as it separates the First Act from the Second and the year 1930 from 1931. The line is the border between Mexico and California. Yet, Esperanza, at twelve years old, crosses the border and learns that even under desperate conditions, she grows strong. Perhaps stronger than she would ever have been otherwise.



QUESTION: Have you ever had to choose to make a change that you resisted? Something like moving to a new school or losing a friend. Looking back, can you see that something good came from that change? How did it cause you to grow?



This play takes place in the early 1930's, a time known as the Great Depression. The older people in your family may know stories about what it was like to live through that time. Ask, and see if you can learn what it was like and why it was given that name.

Although the story told in this play is fictional, it was originally based on the author's grandmother's immigration experience from Mexico to the United States. **Find out the stories of the immigration of your family.**

Check it Out!

Esperanza Rising is based on the book of the same name written by Pam Muñoz Ryan. Read it before you come or after you have seen the play. *It is a rich story that contains much wisdom about outgrowing biases, seeking justice, and becoming whole.* (ages 8 +)

Becoming Naomi Leon, by Pam Muñoz Ryan. *When Naomi's mother comes to get her, Naomi runs away to Mexico with her great-grandmother and brother to search for her father.* (ages 8 -12)

You may feel like you have talked to the author herself after spending some time at her website. <http://www.pammunozryan.com> And you can see a picture of her grandmother – the original Esperanza! (add */familyph.html* to the end of the address).

The Ancestors Are Singing, by Tony Johnston. *A collection of poems reflecting the culture, customs, daily life, and history of Mexico.* (ages 8-12)

Children of the Dust Bowl: the True Story of the School at Woodpatch, by Jerry Stanley. *Describes the plight of migrant workers who traveled from the Dust Bowl to California during the Great Depression.* (ages 8-14)

The Culture of Mexico (DVD) *Introduces the rich cultural heritage of Mexico and how it effects the daily lives of its citizens.* (all ages)