

***Esperanza Rising* – A Migrant Worker’s Story Ripe with Literary Pickings:
A Language Arts Book Study for ESL Students**

Kathy H. Zimbaldi
Pugh Elementary School

INTRODUCTION

As an ESL teacher in Houston Independent School District, I am close to the immigrant experience, and that is why I was thrilled to see Dr. Rodriguez’s seminar among the list of 2004 offerings. I am a language arts teacher, whose passion is children’s literature, and I am always looking for new ways to promote second language acquisition through literature-based units of study. Recent research shows that the traditional ESL strategies (using sentence patterns, vocabulary drills and syntax exercises to teach L2 learners) are not as effective as language studies in the context of authentic literature-based units. I have been successful using this approach in the past; the world of children’s literature offers great variety, selection, and award-winning authors from which to choose. Indeed, in my experience thus far, I have found that the motivation and eagerness of my students escalates when they are exposed to the language through multi-cultural children’s literature.

My plan is to develop a unit that addresses the immigrant experience, old and new. Within the unit, I hope to focus on the award-winning children’s novel, *Esperanza Rising*, by Pam Munoz Ryan. *Esperanza Rising* is an historical fiction book, written from a 13-year-old girl’s point of view. It is 13 chapters long, and traces the heroine’s escape from her beloved Mexico, to the migrant farms of California. As the story unfolds, Esperanza is faced with grave life – threatening episodes for which she is totally unprepared. Her life in Mexico, prior to the circumstances requiring her necessary flight, has been one of pampered wealth. She finds herself faced with serious identity issues, which force her to confront her own imminent need for maturation and emotional growth. Her soul-searching is both touching and heart rending; in many ways she is any adolescent girl faced with the problem solving trials of growing up. As an immigrant she is poor and unskilled, a stark contrast to the refined young lady she was in Mexico. The reader is both charmed and sympathetic as Esperanza, dethroned, attempts to learn the most basic survival skills for life in a new country. The world she knew is far away, and what she knew there matters very little in migrant work.

This novel is the core of my unit. Its relevant theme for ESL kids makes it a natural choice for my purposes. It is my plan to use this book to introduce my students to the reading of chapter books, and the joys contained therein. Up until this point in the curriculum, they have only been exposed to basal readers and textbooks. Because their reading experiences in English have been confined to short stories like those found in picture books, a novel in English can be daunting, if not torturous. I want to make their first experience with a lengthy novel not just enjoyable, but exciting. It is crucial that the

choice be carefully made if I intend to elicit “can’t put it down” responses from them. *Esperanza Rising* provides a means by which I am still able to deliver the mandated curriculum; I can focus on language acquisition skills in a way that makes learning a second language something my students are eager to do. Indeed, I hope to make this book study the highlight of their day and the book they beg to hear. I know from personal experience that when student interest is high and prior knowledge is activated, the learning potential is great!

Throughout our reading, which will be done orally and daily, the students will be exposed to new vocabulary, a great sampling of English/ Spanish cognates (always a hit when reluctant non-speakers are part of the student population), and extensive writing opportunities. In order to maximize the language learning potential, students will each be given an individual copy of the novel. This will allow them to make a visual connection with the pronunciations they hear, as the story is read aloud by a native speaker.

The reading of this novel will be “sandwiched,” if you will, between social studies lessons concerning immigration (documented and undocumented) at the time of the novel’s setting (post – revolutionary Mexico and the United States Depression years), and our contemporary immigration policy and the real-life experiences of recent immigrants. The historical presentation seems appropriate before we begin reading, along with some time spent on Cesar Chavez and his work with the migrant population of California. It is also relevant to examine women’s rights (or lack thereof), as well as the sentiments of the working class toward the privileged in post-revolutionary Mexico.

Post-*Esperanza* study will focus on contemporary issues of immigration, specifically the topics that are relevant to the fourth grade ESL students in Houston, Texas. I intend to acquaint my students with information about current immigration law and perhaps give voice to the issues concerning the immigrant life for inhabitants of our own Denver Harbor school and surrounding community. Pertinent topics for discussion would include their own family’s status, separation issues, fractured family ties, and the element of stress resulting from fear of deportation or existing anti-immigrant sentiments.

My unit is entitled “*Esperanza Rising* – A Migrant Worker’s Story Ripe with Literary Pickings: A Language Arts Book Study for ESL Students.” I envision the unit lasting approximately four weeks and roughly divided into three main parts:

- 1) Pre-reading historical background lessons and activities
- 2) An in-depth novel study
- 3) A post-reading study of contemporary immigration issues.

Within this framework, the thrust of the unit will be language arts based, and student activities will be developed using the language arts strands in HISD’S Project Clear: Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Listening. It is my hope that this unit will help my students effectively transition from the bilingual model that has been their experience into confident English language learners.

PART 1 – PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

My objective in Part 1 of this unit is to provide students with some historical background in preparation for our novel. I plan to divide this section into two parts: one, a study of migrant farm work in America, which will begin with a broad introduction and then ultimately narrow our focus to the efforts of Cesar Chavez and the formation of the United Farmworkers Union; and two, a short summary of the historical events leading up to the Mexican Revolution in 1910, and the post-war sentiments/living conditions of both the wealthy and the poor in Mexico, circa 1920-1930.

I will begin by presenting my class with a large basket of fresh produce and suggesting some very basic questions for consideration: Where do you suppose this came from? Where could it have come from? Where is the most likely place it came from? I will then divide my class into five groups and provide each group a type of produce. Their group task will be to trace this fruit or vegetable's journey from its seedling state to our classroom. Working backwards, they must include all possible stages along the way (grocery or farmer's market, transport trucks, packing sheds, picker's baskets, grower's farmland, etc.). My hope is that they will realize how many types of workers are involved in the growth, production, shipment, and sale of the piece of fruit that eventually ends up as our snack. Having thus established the fact that many hands are involved in the process, I will ask my students to choose one type of labor we discussed and imagine a day in the life of someone in that occupation. What is a packer's day like? A picker's? A grower's? A truck driver's? A grocer's? We'll spend some time discussing our thoughts and then focus on the farmworker. I plan then to read aloud from Alma Flor Ada's *Gathering the Sun*, a wonderful alphabet book about migrant farmwork, written in both English and Spanish. This will be the perfect introduction to the next part of the unit, which focuses on migrant farming and the efforts of Cesar Chavez.

In the next part of this section of the unit study, I plan to make use of 5 children's books: *Cesar Chavez, Man of Courage*, by Florence M. White; *Cesar Chavez and La Causa*, by Naurice Roberts; *Harvesting Hope, the Story of Cesar Chavez*, by Kathleen Krull; *La Causa, the Migrant Farmworkers Story*, by Dana Catherine de Ruiz; and *My Diary From Here to There*, by Amada Irma Perez. Each of my five classroom groups will be given one book to read and report on. Using a technique well known in educational settings as the "Jigsaw," the books will each be divided into sections. Each child will be responsible for reading the assigned section and summarizing its content. The group then compiles the summaries into one report to be shared with the class. With five group reports and ample class discussions throughout the reporting, my students will have acquired sufficient background knowledge to begin the reading of *Esperanza Rising*.

There remains then, only one area left to explore before we begin our novel, and that is the historical setting of *Esperanza Rising*. The story is set in Aguascalientes, Mexico, circa 1930. References are made in the early pages of the book to the Mexican Revolution of 1910. I plan to use the website <www.mex.connect.com> to provide students with a very brief outline of events leading up to the revolution (the deposing of

Porfirio Diaz, the unequal distribution of wealth for a small privileged group, and the impoverished living and working conditions for the much larger group of peasants). Despite the fact that the revolution ended in 1919, there is still great resentment among the poor toward the wealthy, and vigilante banditos still roam and rob at random and with apparent impunity in the post war era. Women have no voting or property rights, and a tacit caste system of rich and poor still dominates the social stratum.

With our pre-reading historical background activities completed, we are ready to begin our novel.

PART 2 – THE NOVEL

My intent is to create an in depth novel study that will address the English language learner’s needs in HISD’s Project Clear language arts strands of Speaking, Reading, Writing, and Listening. While some of the activities developed will vary with each chapter we read, and be dependent on the content itself, others will remain constant and provide a stable framework for the novel study. Vocabulary building will be one such constant. I am a firm believer in pre-reading vocabulary activity, as nothing inhibits comprehension more than not knowing what words mean. It is not only discouraging to a struggling reader; it also destroys the fluidity of the narrative and subsequent enjoyment of the piece. With a word map designed to be student friendly and independently used, readers will research a list of new, difficult, and unusual words from each chapter. The word map will include activities that require students to provide word in context, “guesses” at word meaning, as well as actual definitions from the dictionary. Additionally, students will use thesauruses to locate synonyms and antonyms for each new word. Finally, they will write meaningful sentences using their new words.

In each chapter we will create word lists of English/ Spanish cognates. This is an especially interesting activity and a useful tool for the English language learner of Hispanic origin. Cognates make the reading of English a much less daunting endeavor; indeed, cognates can make the English language appear “friendlier” to the Spanish speaker.

The third constant in our chapter-by-chapter, daily oral reading will be reading comprehension activities. These will often, but not always, happen in a Literature Circle format, with readers divided into cooperative groupings of three students each. Each student will be assigned a duty within the group of reporter, leader, or scribe, and each will be accountable as an individual and as a group member. Comprehension discussion questions will be provided each group, and teacher led discussions will follow after the findings of each group are presented.

***Esperanza Rising* – Chapter Summaries**

Esperanza is six years old and her Papi’s darling when the story begins in Aguascalientes, Mexico, 1924. In these short introductory pages, the reader meets Esperanza and her papi

as they walk the vast vineyard of El Rancho de La Rosas. Here he introduces her to his other love—the valley that “lives and breathes” and is the source of their privileged status in Mexican society. Papi is a wealthy landowner and Esperanza is his only beloved child.

Chapter 1

Quickly the story moves to the first chapter entitled “Las Uvas” (The Grapes) and it is six years later, the eve of Esperanza’s thirteenth birthday. Grapes are significant in this chapter because Esperanza’s birthday celebration coincides with the great harvest. Although she is a girl, she is Papi’s only child, and is therefore permitted the ceremonial honor of cutting the first bunch. In this very first chapter the ESL student (especially one of Mexican extraction) is smitten. Ryan effortlessly weaves Spanish phrases into the dialogue; the result is surprisingly fluid and definitely adds to the flavor of the narrative. I have read this story before to ESL students with confidence that the familiar phrases will “hook” them immediately. I am never disappointed and the look of pleasant surprise on their faces is gratifying. It must be so comforting to see something familiar in otherwise “foreign” prose. I doubt that this was done unwittingly. I imagine the author had just this in mind as she wrote *Esperanza*; it is her gift to them as she writes from the heart for the English language learner.

Equally appealing is Ryan’s use of rich imagery. Indeed, it is so pervasive in her writing that it inspires a teacher like me to use this same imagery to provide multi-sensory experiences for the ESL reader. Each chapter in this book is named for a food item, and it is my plan to provide samples of each food for tasting while we read. The chapter titles each represent an event in the chapter, and are symbolically linked to Esperanza’s life. We begin with grapes, often suggested in folklore to be a food of the gods, and here representative of Esperanza’s sweet life of privilege.

Fruits and other food items are not the only images in this book, though the story is written around them and they remain the central focus of each chapter. But there are also the lovely roses for which the ranch is named, and they are Papi’s prized beauties. They prominently share the table’s centerpiece with the grapes of the harvest. They are so important to Papi that he gifts family members with individual bushes and affectionately names them for the recipients. In *Esperanza Rising*, they are an important image in that they are the one constant in Esperanza’s changing life – sometimes hidden, sometimes dormant – but always present and always nurtured.

As the first chapter continues, we learn that Papi has taken a day trip on horseback to work the cattle with the vaqueros. When he is late returning, concerns for his safety mount with each passing hour. It is 1930, true, and ten years since the Mexican Revolution, but there is still great resentment in the working class toward the privileged. Papi is a benevolent landowner, and generous to the campesinos, but do the banditos know that? As fears escalate throughout the household, Miguel and Alfonso, Papi’s loyal companeros, are dispatched to search, and the women are left at home to worry and wait.

Very late that night, the men return with Papi's body; he has been attacked and murdered by banditos. Papi is dead and Esperanza's life changes forever.

Chapter 2

It is Esperanza's thirteenth birthday and this chapter begins with the words to las mananitas, the traditional Mexican birthday song. ESL students are delighted by this touch and it takes very little coaxing from me to have them deliver a rousing rendition of this well-known favorite. Even the non-English speaker can join in; this adds an important element to our reading. Often the non-speakers understand a great deal, but lack the necessary vocabulary to participate in class discussions. Here their voice is heard; this simple activity validates the linguistic ability of the ELL child, who longs to share but lacks the forum. As obvious as it may seem, its importance cannot be overlooked; the affective filters of fear, isolation, and anxiety play a major role in language acquisition. Any time a teacher creates a comfortable classroom climate suitable for language acquisition, receptive and expressive ability levels increase.

As we begin reading Chapter 2, we find we are the only ones to sing mananitas to Esperanza. She awakens from her birthday dream to discover she is alone in the house; Mama has left to make funeral arrangements for Papi. She answers a knock at the door and finds her father's best friend, Senor Rodriguez, waiting with a papaya delivery; Papi's last arrangements were for Esperanza's special birthday dish and papayas are the main ingredient. (Naturally, *Las Papayas* is the title of Chapter 2.) Senor Rodriguez has not heard of the murder and Esperanza tells him of last night's tragedy. He is overcome with grief and she is overwhelmed by the unbearable sweetness of Papi's birthday gesture; it tears at her heart as she beholds an act of love that belies the finality of death.

In the sorrow filled days following this delivery, full of funeral masses and visitations, the papayas remain untended, yet yielding a pungent sweetness as a reminder of Papi's last gift.

As if the Ortega family has not endured enough, the end of Chapter 2 brings new grief and unexpected worry. Papi's will, while generous to his survivors, cannot undo the strict code of Mexican law. Mama is permitted to inherit the house and all of its holdings, but not the land on which it rests. Females, in 1930 Mexico, cannot own land. Our previous study of post-revolutionary Mexico and women's rights will serve us well here; students will already be familiar with the intricacies and sometimes the inequities of Mexican civil law.

The land now belongs to Papi's stepbrother, Tio Luis, who is all too ready to insinuate himself into their lives. With political ambitions and substantial financial assets, Luis lacks only a wife of great respectability and high social prominence. He sees in the widow Ramona Ortega an opportunity for advancement – Luis wants to be governor someday. He is a formidable foe and not to be rebuked. When Ramona refuses his

marriage proposal, her home and the grape arbor are torched. With all of her possessions and her only income-producing arbor in ashes, Ramona must make a painful though necessary decision. Luis compounds her peril with the threat of further violence toward the servants. Ramona has no choice but to flee Mexico; for Luis's sinister influence and power are far-reaching. The fire and flight are the stuff of Chapter 3, entitled "Los Higos" (Figs); the family's escape requires the aid of Senor Rodriguez, Papi's best friend and the only soul brave enough to help them escape. As the plans are hatched, Senor Rodriguez appears daily with baskets of figs. They provide his excuse for frequent "condolence" visits and become a symbol of the deceit and secrecy that cloaks their travel.

Chapter 4

As we begin Chapter 4, "Los Guayabas" (Guavas), the plan for escape unfolds. The household servants have family in the United States, specifically in the farming communities of Southern California, and that becomes their destination. At this point in our reading, I think my students will be ready for a little geographic exploration of their own. I think they will find it interesting to trace the Ortega journey on printed maps that we will download from a geographic website. According to the story, the journey begins in Aguascalientes and continues to Zacatecas, Mexicali, and then on to Los Angeles. Although the means of transportation is by no means first class (Esperanza is shocked to be riding in the back of the train with the campesinos instead of in the first class cars she is accustomed to), students will realize that Esperanza has it better than most. Many immigrants who flee Mexico (then and now) must do so on foot. Using the atlas and map legends, we'll chart the traveler's journey, noting the mileage, terrain, and climate as they go. My hope is that this experience will provide my students with a true picture of immigrant travel and the hardships that must be endured.

Because Esperanza comes from a prominent family, strings can still be pulled and the precious, necessary "papers" gotten quickly. She will cross the border into the United States documented, not illegally, as so many must. I imagine this part of the chapter will spark some lively discussion in my classroom. Ever since I began teaching ESL students three years ago, I have been asked repeatedly if I "have papers?" At first I was amused; I always answered that yes, I indeed have papers as I am a United States citizen. I soon realized that many of my students did not make that connection. For them, there were only two groups: those with and those without papers. The why and how you come to have them is immaterial, even irrelevant. In the community where I teach, the issue of "papers" means far more than documentation. It creates a caste system of the haves and have-nots. Those with papers are of a different social stratum: independent, able, and fearless. Those without live in fear, dependence, and sometimes even ignorance. "Papers" label those who can and those who cannot, and therefore, who has opportunity and who does not.

The chapter of the Guavas holds significant meaning for Esperanza. It is here that she suffers the first of many identity crises for which she is totally unprepared. Dressed in

clothes from the church poor box, which are as much a necessity as a disguise, she begins her flight in a rickety wagon full of guavas. She is literally buried beneath them, along with Mama and the trusted servant Hortensia, so that Tio Luis does not learn of the hasty escape. The guavas provide the means by which the flight is possible; they also symbolize the burial, or death, of Esperanza's privileged life in Mexico. No longer the wealthy landowner's daughter, she is as poor and pitiful as the campesinos she travels with. Her tender adolescent ego is not ready for such sudden change. Outwardly, she is a peasant, but inwardly she remains the proud and sometimes haughty Esperanza.

Chapter 5

Chapter five finds the travelers disembarking the train. They are in Los Angeles finally. Crossing the border was not a problem, as their papers were found to be in order and they were able to prove the promise of work waiting for them. Esperanza is shocked to discover that what Mama has been telling her all along is true: she is poor and she is a campesina. The chapter's title refers to her first meal in the United States-free melons in a field en route to the Mexican migrant camp. She must scramble with the rest of the migrants through the field where they lay abandoned. They are apparently surplus crop or not fit for sale. Either way, it is a humiliating experience, but she is hungry and needs to eat. In this chapter she is confronted with discrimination she is not prepared to battle, much less understand. She finds she is still an outsider, despised by many because she was once rich. As she and Miguel have previously discussed, the rich and poor "stand on opposite sides of the river" in Mexico, and never should, or do, mix. Esperanza is not prepared to be disliked, or to account for the life she once enjoyed. She finds she is not accepted readily, as are the campesinos who were once her servants. She must prove herself worthy of their company. In the migrant camps the kudos go to those who know how to work hard, in the fields and in the business of survival. Esperanza can do neither, as she has never even bathed herself!

At this point in our reading, my students are ripe for a compare/contrast writing experience: Esperanza then, and now. Because ESL students are often intimidated by writing assignment (for many it is the weakest skill of all four language arts strands), our pre-writing experiences need to be thorough and ample. This step in the writing process is crucial for the ESL student. Group brainstorming, Venn diagrams, and clear, simple outlining activities, all provide the "stuff" with which to brave a first draft. This activity will also provide a nice "mini" experience in writing that will come in handy later. While this activity will focus on the obvious physical differences in Esperanza's character (appearance and life circumstances), a later assignment will focus on the emotional growth and maturation of the changed Esperanza at story's end.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 is entitled "Las Cebollas" (Onions). This is the crop that is ready for harvest, though Esperanza is too young to work in the fields. She learns that she must stay at

home while the adults work and that she is responsible for cooking, cleaning, laundry, and babysitting. Aside from the fact that she has never done any of these things, the task that proves most difficult for her is sweeping. All of her other jobs are done for the people she lives with, who know and love her despite her poor life skills. The sweeping is to be done for the camp and is a public chore. Here she must face the taunts of other campesinos, as she attempts to sweep the elusive onionskins from the community platform. She is hopelessly inept and her pathetic attempt earns her the nickname “Cenicienta” (Cinderella). The chapter’s title stands for the job that earns her public humiliation, and for the tears she sheds from the ridicule.

Chapter 7

In this chapter, Miguel has prepared a lovely surprise for Esperanza, to take the sting out of her recent humiliating experiences. He leads her to a space behind the cabin, where he has erected a makeshift shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Surrounding the shrine are small leafless plantings full of thorny stems. They were carried secretly and lovingly from Aquascalientes. It seems Miguel had salvaged some of Papi’s roses after the fire, tending them carefully all the way from Mexico, so that Mama and Esperanza could have a piece of Papi, and home, in their new surroundings. Mama and Esperanza are deeply touched.

With new determination then, Esperanza attempts to learn all she needs to know about her new jobs. She receives a crash course in basic homemaking skills from Miguel’s cousin, Isabel, who is only seven years old, but light years ahead of Esperanza in terms of work ethic and responsibility. This chapter is entitled “Las Almendras” (Almonds) and in it Esperanza learns some frightening news. The almonds are the crop, which are targeted by a fast growing group of militant migrants determined to strike for better wages. At the weekly jamaica, spontaneous demonstrations occur. It is there that Esperanza learns that pressure is growing for all workers to band together, including Esperanza’s group. She is not entirely sure what this will mean for her own little extended family, but she has seen enough to know that living and working conditions are awful for some. She learns that her own living and working conditions, however appalling they were to her initially, are better than most. At least Esperanza’s camp has toilets; others have no such luxury. In addition to the terrible living conditions, workers live in fear that competition for jobs will increase with the influx of “Okies”(workers from Oklahoma), into their area. Okies, desperate for employment, will work for whatever they are paid, and this undermines the efforts of the established laborers to demand higher wages.

This issue should spark some lively debate among my students. In our pre-reading activities, we will have learned about the United Farmworkers Movement and Cesar Chavez. This historical perspective will serve us well as we read the next few chapters .It must be noted here that the discussion of this issue need not be limited to the historical era of *Esperanza Rising*. The entire issue of organized labor is one that is current as well.

I think my students will be genuinely interested and respond easily to discussions about job market competition and fair wages in Houston, Texas, 2004. Many of their parents are laborers; their mothers are often employed as domestic help in affluent Houston households. My students are privy to family discussions concerning job security and wages earned. In many respects, they can speak more knowledgeably about the subject than their non-immigrant peers.

It is my hope that these discussions will make my students more eager readers, and more confident speakers and writers. I am hoping that the relevance of the topic will coax responses from even the most reluctant ones. Getting and holding a student's interest is a teacher's greatest challenge, and I know from experience that students love a great story. It is certainly more fun to teach language arts this way, and I hope that my enthusiasm for the lessons will be contagious too!

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 presents a new challenge for Esperanza. In a sense, it is her first "test" in her new job. It seems Isabel is to go to school, and Esperanza will be left alone with all of the household chores. In addition to the housekeeping, Esperanza must care for a set of year-old twins by herself. Because she needs food for the babies' lunch, she chooses an easy, timesaving dish of fresh, mashed plums. She does not realize that infants cannot digest uncooked fruit, and the result is a disastrous case of diarrhea for the twins. Now, in addition to the regular chores, she has a mound of soiled diapers to wash, and two sick, crying babies with terrible stomach cramps! She remembers a home remedy given to her when she was sick, and magically, it calms their stomachs. Thus, the title of this chapter, *Las Ciruelas* (Plums) is aptly named. It stands for the disaster of the twins' lunch, but also for her new problem solving abilities when she is put to the test.

Just when she thinks the worst is over, a dust storm appears suddenly as Isabel returns from school. Esperanza's newly developing problem solving skills are soon put to a greater test. The dust storm is awful; the dust, propelled by fierce winds, showers everything in its path, including the workers and the crops they are picking. When the workers finally arrive back at camp, their lungs are full of dust and breathing is problematic. All family members recover but Mama; her lungs have not had time to adjust to the agricultural dust spores in the area and she contracts Valley Fever. Her recovery is not certain. If she survives, her body will need many months to regain its strength. Now Esperanza faces the possibility of losing the only family member she has left. Moreover, Mama provides the only income they have and Mama is too sick to work.

Chapter 9

With the strike plans thwarted by an act of God, Esperanza's group gains a respite from increasing pressure to join in. It is not that they don't sympathize with the striker's cause. It is simply a matter of mouths to feed. And Esperanza has a new focus-she must find

work. Mama is taken to a hospital, where her chances for recovery are better, but that leaves Esperanza with bills to pay. She manages to get work with the women who cut potato eyes, hence the title *Las Papas* (Potatoes). Potato eyes are used for reseeded. For Esperanza, they are the means by which she earns her keep, pays for Mama's nursing care, and "seeds" her own venture. She intends to bring her grandmother from Aguascalientes to Los Angeles. Abuela has been left behind in Mexico, and Esperanza knows that she is the key to Mama's recovery. In addition to the Valley Fever, Mama now suffers from depression. The traumatic events of the last months following Papi's death have proven too much for even Mama's vital spirit to bear. Esperanza is sure Abuela's presence will heal Mama's ailing spirit.

Being among the workers brings Esperanza closer to the harsh realities of migrant farming life. While cutting potato eyes, she sees with new eyes the wrongs the strikers hope to right. She becomes sensitized to the indignities and inequities within the various camps. Okies, who are white, get hot running water and a swimming pool. They generously allow the Mexicans to use it on Fridays, the day before it is cleaned. Anger begins to grow inside young Esperanza; she has new respect for the strikers who once just seemed "so angry" to her. The growing respect makes it harder for Esperanza to ignore them, and ignore them she must if she is to remain focused on her personal needs and goals. But cutting potato eyes also makes her privy to inside gossip. The strikers have become desperate, and are threatening harm to those who refuse to strike with them. They cannot allow scabs to lessen the effect of the strike. What can, what should, Esperanza do?

Chapter 10

Los Aguacates (Avocados) once meant Mama's mouth-watering guacamole to Esperanza. Now they are the medicine for her rough, red, campesina hands. While sitting with her hands slathered in a mixture of Hortensia's glycerin/avocado hand repair formula, Esperanza has some very grown up thoughts. How can this simple fruit mean such different things to so many people? In Mexico she cared little, if at all, about where things came from. They just appeared, for her pleasure, at her wanting. Seasons now mean crops, and months are named for the harvest they pick. Filled with shame at her own early life of privilege and self-indulgence, she ponders the paradox of the haves and have-nots. The have-nots, while living a life of poverty, need the haves to want, so that they may work their way above the poverty level. In America, she stands with Miguel on the same side of the river, wondering how she once cared so little about who was on that side. It is a fine line, a careful balancing act, to keep one's thoughts focused on the goal. I know the parents of my students perform this balancing act daily; it remains to be seen if this reading will evoke such sentiments from my young readers. I do know that my students are aware of how hard their parents work for them. I also know they are all too aware of what unemployed parents feel, and what effect unemployment has on an immigrant family. Their livelihood depends on people hiring them to do a job these same people can afford not to do. It is difficult to be resentful and grateful at the same time, but

that is the lot of the immigrant. Can my students express this reality that exists in barrio living? Are they sophisticated enough thinkers to digest such life lessons? That question can only be answered by an ESL teacher who uses this book with a given student population. Some may be blissfully unaware, but surely others can comprehend the paradox. I intend to allow my students to guide me here. If this chapter opens a Pandora's Box of emotions, so be it. But, if it does not, I am prepared to move on and not belabor the point to my own satisfaction. If this unit is deemed teacher friendly enough to be used in older populations, then I imagine it will be a powerful, motivational tool for a writing project. Nothing motivates the need to write more than having one's senses stirred. It remains to be seen if this will happen with my 4th grade ESL population.

Chapter 11

Los Esparragos (Asparagus) becomes the crop the strikers deem most likely to affect growers. If not picked by June, the tender stalks wither from the sun's intense heat. The strikers must slow the workers who continue to pick, or risk an ineffective strike. What Esperanza feared would happen does happen. Workers are forced to choose sides, and the strikers are not above punishing those who will not join the cause. It matters not why – if you are not for the strike then you are against it. Crossing the picket line is frightening and dangerous, and Esperanza's group must carry weapons to protect themselves against the violence. And once they are inside the sheds they must be wary; the strikers have ways of intimidating them beyond the picket line.

The strike does not last long however. The growers make good their threats to inform La Migra (immigration officials). Esperanza knows there is great hypocrisy in this act. The growers are all well aware that they employ undocumented migrant workers; indeed, conditions in Mexico and the United States provide them a steady flow of desperate people willing to enhance their profit margin by working for ridiculously low wages. But the growers use La Migra to keep the campesinos in line. At the first sign of insurrection, they call out La Migra to do a sweep and restore order. The sweep does not affect the growers, but it does set an example for the workers to fear. Quiet, satisfied, hard workers are left alone.

Chapter 12 – Los Duraznos (Peaches)

Despite Alfonso's belief that well-behaved, non-striking employees would be rewarded with loyalty from the company growers, Esperanza's group soon learns that a camp is being prepared for Okies. They are white, they speak English, and they will compete for jobs. At the same time, Isabel prays daily to be crowned Queen of the May at school. Even though a Mexican has never been chosen, (the title always goes to a white, English speaking girl), Isabel desperately wants to win. It seems that Esperanza cannot help facing what is all around her. It is not her poverty that makes her undesirable; it is her race, her color, and her language. These are things she cannot change, no matter how hard she works. Her heart aches for Isabel, who must learn this lesson at such a tender

age. The title of the chapter refers to Isabel's favorite fruit, Los Duraznos (Peaches), and Esperanza makes sure to bring some home from work on the day the May Queen is chosen. She hopes they will take the sting out of the bitter disappointment she knows Isabel will face. The peaches then, become symbolic of Esperanza's maturational growth and selflessness. No longer a self-absorbed little girl, Esperanza now thinks more of others than herself, and seeks to shield the innocent and helpless from harm.

When Miguel appears not to be angry enough about the discrimination, he and Esperanza have words. She accuses him of being too accepting of campesino life and the inequities. He tells her she has not been a campesino long enough to lecture him. When she wakes the following morning, he is gone.

But, there is good news too. Mama is pronounced well enough to return home and Esperanza is overjoyed. When she proudly runs to show Mama all the money she has saved, she discovers that it, like Miguel, has disappeared.

Chapter 13 – Las Uvas

The final chapter begins with the group consensus that Miguel has left with Esperanza's hard earned savings. Esperanza is furious; his parents, Hortensia and Alfonso, are terribly embarrassed. But Mama's health continues to improve, and for that Esperanza is truly grateful. Just a few weeks later, Alfonso appears unexpectedly at the packing sheds where Esperanza works, with an urgent message from Miguel. He would arrive by train that afternoon and Esperanza must be there to meet him. Astonished by his audacity, (he makes no mention of the stolen savings) Esperanza reluctantly accompanies Alfonso to the train station. There Miguel boldly confronts Esperanza with his confident presence, and she struggles to be civil to him. He has brought her a priceless surprise, her Abuelita, all the way from Aguascalientes! Now the mystery is solved. Miguel smuggled Abuela out of Aguascalientes and used Esperanza's savings to do it! She is overcome with joy and gratitude, as she is reunited with her grandmother after a full year of heartbreaking separation. Abuela, she knows, is the special medicine to fully cure Mama's depression. There is a joyful reunion when Abuela joins the family at the work camp. Esperanza is amazed by her new set of values. Only one year ago, she would have been ashamed for her abuela to see her squalid living conditions and her rough, red campesina hands. Now, she proudly outlines her year of achievements for Abuela in terms of crops. They arrived at the end of the grapes, and Mama became sick soon after. During potato eyes, Mama had gone to the hospital. The strike occurred during asparagus, and Abuela arrived during plums. Now it is grapes time again and Esperanza is turning another year older. This time, on the morning of her birthday, the migrant men serenade Esperanza with a lively rendition of las mananitas. And, while it would never be the same as her birthdays of years past, that is fine with Esperanza. She is no longer the same Esperanza. She is full of hope (thus the significance of her name) and new aspirations – of learning English and prospering in her new land. And, she is full of her newfound confidence that she will indeed achieve them.

At this point in our book study, with our novel reading finished, my students will be ready for a compare/contrast writing experience. With the help of the paragraphs written in Chapter 5 as reference guides, students will create character maps of Esperanza at age 13 and 14. Each map will contain traits to be considered in the pre-writing phase: physical attributes, personality traits, emotional maturity, social skills, and work ethics. Once accomplished, these maps will provide the building blocks for a four-paragraph essay. Working together from an outline in four parts, (one paragraph introduction, two paragraph compare/contrast body, and one paragraph conclusion), they will take their essays through the remaining stages of the writing process: first draft, peer revision, second draft, final revision, and publication. This final assignment should provide a satisfying wrap-up to our two-week Esperanza study.

PART 3 – POST-READING ACTIVITIES

As I mused about this part of my unit, and how best to approach it, I decided that while it was definitely a worthy course of study, it was not one to be treated lightly. I say this after listening to the remarks of my fellows, many of them immigrants themselves, who have valid sentiments regarding immigration issues for children. I have come to the conclusion that this part of my unit requires a caveat, for immigration law remains an emotionally charged issue for some. Therefore, I leave it up to the individuals who use this unit to weigh the merits of this part against the possible negative side effects. While I feel strongly that the reading of *Esperanza Rising* will raise quite naturally the questions surrounding current immigration policy, it is very important that a teacher handle these discussions with great sensitivity. If the purpose of this unit is to give and receive information, then it would be negligent to ignore the topic completely. Curious children ask questions, and they deserve well-informed teachers with correct information, who are sensitive to the emotional vulnerabilities of their young audiences.

In any event, this unit will allow for a short period of time spent on familiarizing students with current immigration policy. I plan to present a very basic, cursory look at “Ways People Come to the U. S.” Within this framework, undocumented immigrants will be explained, but the point will not be belabored. (This, in deference to the very astute remarks of my colleagues who voiced concerns about raising children’s anxiety levels concerning their own family status, in the very likely event that some members of any given student population may indeed be undocumented.)

I intend to use the United States Immigration Support website as a specific resource for this part of the unit. Our school computer lab has Internet access, and I plan to introduce this part of my unit with a lesson taught there. Students will be shown how to access the website and how to use the various links to learn about tourist visas, green cards, and how to apply for U.S. citizenship. I will also use the book, *Everything You Need to Know if You and Your Parents Are New American*, by Edward J. Santos. This is a very readable overview for students at about the 4th grade level. It contains short chapters on the “History of Immigration in the U. S.,” “Coming to America,” (including a very

good few paragraphs under the subheading “Who Gets In and Who Doesn’t”), and “Fitting In.” For ESL students, I especially recommend the section on Bilingualism, within the “Hanging on to Your Heritage” chapter.

And finally, because our discussions and reading up until this point will have naturally centered on immigrants from Mexico, I think it is important to expose my students to the stories of immigrants from other countries. In *New Kids On the Block*, Janet Bode has compiled oral histories of immigrant teens from all over the globe. Each story is distinctly unique, and yet the same. While some of the culture shock is diet and fashion related, some is deeply embedded in religious and social differences. By exposing my students to these various stories, I hope to have them see a kinship among the experiences of all immigrants, but also realize that each story is unique – neither better nor worse, but valid in its individual perspective as well.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1 – Pre-Reading Vocabulary Exercise

Objective

Using the word map below as a reference tool, students will learn, understand, and use correctly the new words from our novel.

Materials

Word map
Dictionaries
Thesauruses
Word list from a chapter of *Esperanza Rising*

Name

Date

Word Map



Word



Representation or symbol of word

Word in context (write the entire sentence):

Define the word using your dictionary:

Part of speech _____

Synonym _____ Antonym _____

Prefix _____ Suffix _____

Write a meaningful sentence using your new word:

Lesson Plan 2 – Geographic Exploration

Charting the Journey

Ideally, this lesson should take place in a computer lab where all students have Internet access. Children will access the three geographic websites found in the bibliography, and complete activities designed for each one.

Part 1

Begin by having students go to the National Geographic website:

<<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/index>>. There they will find printable maps with easy to understand map legends. They should access the map of Mexico and answer the following questions:

1. Calculate the mileage from Aguascalientes to Zacatecas.
2. From Zacatecas to Mexicali
3. From Mexicali to Los Angeles

What is the total mileage of the trip from Aguascalientes to Los Angeles?

Part 2

Visit the next website on the list, which is www.childrensatlas.com. After locating the continent of North America on the interactive map, they should zoom in on Mexico. They can follow a link to locate the land regions map, which has an easy to use legend for determining the terrain and climate of a given area. Here students should:

1. Note the land type and climate of each of the 3 stopping points in the Mexican leg of the journey.

2. Predict what type of travel difficulties might one expect if there are mountains?
Rivers? Plains? Deserts?

Part 3

Go to the final website, which is <<http://www.infoplease.com>>.

There students should browse the website to find any other pertinent or interesting facts about the geography of Mexico.

Finally, students will use their notes to participate in small group discussions and compile their findings. A reporter from each group will share knowledge with the class. Some questions to be considered in small group discussions are:

1. What are your thoughts about Esperanza's trip?
2. Remember it is 1930 and several traveling aids we use today have not yet been invented. Imagine you are on this trip and now in the back of the cousins' truck. How do you feel? Why?

Teacher-led class discussion will follow the reports.

Lesson Plan 3 – Reading Comprehension Activity for Chapter 9, “Las Papas”

Children will form their customary Literature Circles and discuss the following questions:

1. In “Las Papas,” Esperanza learns that there are two sides to the strike issue and both of them have validity. Which side is more compelling to you? Which side is Esperanza's character bound to choose? Why? Make a list of the pros and cons regarding the strike.
2. Can you imagine having your parents depend on you to support them? What could you do? What kind of jobs could someone hire you to do, right now, today? Make a list of all the jobs you feel qualified to do.

Teacher led class discussion will follow group reports.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

- Ada, Alma Flor. *Gathering the Sun*. Singapore: Harper Collins Publishers Inc., 1997.
Lovely alphabet picture book, with text in both English and Spanish. Each letter explains/depicts a facet of migrant farming life.
- Bode, Janet. *New Kids on the Block: Oral Histories of Immigrant Teens*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1989.
A great collection of essays by middle school aged immigrant teens.
- De Ruiz, Dana Catherine. *La Causa, the Migrant Farmworkers' Story*. Austin, Texas: Steck-Vaughn Company, 1993.
Written at about a fourth or fifth grade level, this book will prove useful in the Chavez book study in part 1 of the unit.
- Krull, Kathleen. *Harvesting Hope. The Story of Cesar Chavez*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2003.
A beautifully illustrated picture book biography of Chavez's life.
- Mexico Connect*. May, 2004. <<http://www.mexconnect.com/mex>>.
A good source for all things Mexican. Provides links to interesting cultural traditions, as well as the words to las mananitas.
- National Geographic Society*. 2004.
<<http://www.nationalgeographic.com/xpeditions/atlas/index>>.
Contains great info on land regions and terrains of all continents.
- Perez, Amada Irma. *My Diary From Here to There*. San Francisco: Children's Book Press, 2002.
Details a young girl's journey across the border from Juarez to Los Angeles. Vibrant illustrations and beautifully written text in both English and Spanish.
- Roberts, Naurice. *Cesar Chavez and La Causa*. Chicago: Children's Book Press, 1986.
A biography written at about a fourth-grade level, this book is useful for the struggling reader. Large print – non-intimidating.
- Ryan, Pam Munoz. *Esperanza Rising*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2001.
The basis for this unit; the story of a thirteen year old girl and her escape from Mexico to the migrant farms of California.
- Santos, Edward J. *Everything You and Your Parents Need To Know if You and Your Parents Are New Americans*. New York: Rosen Publishing Group, Inc., 2002.

A great resource for any ESL classroom. Nicely done, with entire chapters devoted to “Hanging on to your heritage” and “Fitting in.”

White, Florence M. *Cesar Chavez Man of Courage*. Illinois: Garrard Publishing Company, 1973.
An easy to read biography for the intermediate or advanced level ESL student.

Additional Resources

Ashabranner, Brent. *Dark Harvest. Migrant Farmworkers in America*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1983.
A great overview of migrant farmworkers as an “invisible,” but indispensable group to the economy.

_____. *Our Beckoning Borders: Illegal Immigration to America*. New York: Cobblehill Books, 1996.
Written to be easily read by intermediate grade students; contains interviews with illegal immigrants and border patrol agents. Of particular note is the chapter devoted to Houston.

_____. *The New Americans*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1993.
Written for junior high level readers, this book focuses on changing patterns in U. S. immigration.

Atkin, S. Beth. *Voices From the Fields*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1993.
A wonderful resource of first person narratives by Hispanic migrant children, many of whom are 9 and 10 years old. With a foreword by Jiminez, (*The Circuit* and *Breaking Through*), it can easily be used with or without his novels. Either way, it is a powerful collection of stories, perfect for the 4th grade ESL child.

Biemiller, Andrew. “Oral Comprehension Sets the Ceiling on Reading Comprehension.” *American Educator* Spring, 2003: 23.
An excellent article supporting the ample use of read aloud literature in the classroom.

Collier, Virginia P., and Carlos J. Ovando. *Bilingual and ESL Classrooms*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998.
A good overview of ESL learning styles and strategies.

Fletcher, Ralph. *Craft Lessons*. York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 1998.
A valuable resource for fourth grade writing teachers.

- _____. *What a Writer Needs*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993.
A writer's autobiography about the writing process with helpful suggestions for the writing teacher.
- Giannatasio, Frank. "Literacy Through Literature: Can ESL Students Who Are Recent Immigrants Learn English More Effectively Through Stories and Simple Novels?" National Council of Teachers of English Research Foundation. 1996.
An interesting study done by an ESL teacher advocating the use of authentic literature to teach L2 learners, rather than traditional ESL models of using language patterns to teach English.
- Hirsch, E.D., Jr. "Reading Comprehension Requires Knowledge of Words and the World." *American Educator*. Spring 2003: 10+.
Contains great information on the 4th grade slump in reading comp scores—the scientific analysis and proposed solutions.
- Houston Independent School District. Project Clear Curriculum. Language Arts, Fourth Grade. Houston, Texas: Houston Independent School District, 2002.
A guide detailing teaching objectives and strategies.
- _____. Language Arts Fourth Grade Model Lessons, Unit 1 Author Study. Houston, Texas: Houston Independent School District, 2002.
A great example of lesson planning for author study.
- Information Please*. 2003. Family Education Network, Inc.
<<http://www.infoplease.com>>.
Another website that provides geographic info about the climate and terrain of the areas studied in this unit.
- Interfact Atlas*. 2001. Two-Can Publishing. <<http://www.childrensatlas.com>>.
A good source for printable maps. Can be used to trace the heroine's journey from Mexico to Los Angeles. Has a great interactive map atlas.
- Jiminez, Francisco. *Breaking Through*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001.
The sequel to *The Circuit*; useful, readable supplemental novel for interested students. A true story of a migrant boy's life in California, circa 1960.
- _____. *The Circuit*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997.
Published prior to *Breaking Through*, it tells the story of the young Panchito; largely biographical and suggested as the first book to be read of this pair.
- Lane, Barry. *After the End: Teaching and Learning Creative Revision*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993.
Lane offers teachers a how to book in the arduous task of student revision.

- Mexico Connect*. May, 2004. <<http://www.inside-mexico.com/revolucion.htm>>. Contains a brief outline of events leading up to the Mexican Revolution.
- Nixon, Joan Lowery. *If You Were a Writer*. New York: Aladdin Paperbacks, 1995. A children's book that offers a glimpse into a writing career.
- Peregoy, Suzanne F. and Owen F. Boyle. *Reading, Writing, and Learning in ESL*. California: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 2001. An ESL teacher's resource that offers extensive support for use of authentic literature to teach language arts.
- Ryan, Pam Munoz. May, 2004. Scholastic, Inc. <<http://pammunozryan.com>>. The author's own website. Has some great links with biographical info, interviews with Ryan about the writing of *Esperanza Rising*, as well as info about her other books. Might be a great enrichment activity post-unit.
- Short, Kathy G. *Literature As a Way of Knowing*. Los Angeles, California: Stenhouse Publishers, 1997. A great handbook supporting the use of literature as a way to learn language.
- Trelease, Jim. *The New Read Aloud Handbook*. New York: Penguin Books, 2001. A must have for every classroom. Useful lists of suggested read alouds by grade level.
- 2003 Curriculum Guide on Mexico*. Houston: Houston International Festival, 2003. Another great resource on traditions, culture, food and language. Particularly helpful for information about the Mexican Revolution, and for lists of cognates.
- US Immigration Services*. 2004. <<http://www.immigrationagency.com>>. The source to be used for the latter part of the unit. It is a good teaching tool for basic info about current immigration policy.
- United Farmworkers*. 2003. <<http://www.ufw.org>>. The official website of the United Farmworkers Union. Might be of some interest to students who want to know more about the organization as it exists now, and has some links to biographical info about Chavez.