

Esperanza Rising Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Esperanza Ortega is a young girl, who grows up in Mexico in the 1920's on Rancho de las Rosas, a vineyard her family owns. Mexico is recovering from the revolution of ten years earlier. There is still a great deal of animosity towards the rich landowners, who are seen to be uncaring of the peasants. The story opens, as she is anticipating the harvest of the grapes from their vineyard that always coincides with her birthday. At the end of the harvest, there is always a wonderful fiesta attended by the servants, *vaqueros*, *campesinos*, and many of the wealthy families in the area. The afternoon before the *iLa cosecha*, or harvest ceremony, Esperanza cuts her finger on a rose thorn, while she is gathering roses for table decorations the next day. As she is thinking this is bad luck, the plot begins.

That evening her mother, Abuelita, who is her grandmother, and Hortenisa, the faithful housekeeper, who has been with them for many years, are very concerned, because her father is late coming home from the fields. Finally, the ranch foreman and his son are sent to look for Papa. Before they arrive back home, two stepbrothers of her father, Tio Luis and Tio Marco, come to the house with Papa's silver belt buckle. It's a very bad sign. Later that night, the ranch foreman and his son return to the house with a wagon carrying the dead body of Papa.

Several days later a lawyer tells Esperanza and her mother that the ranch house and the grapes in the vineyard now belong to them, but, since women are not allowed to own property, the land belongs to the bank. The bank president happens to be Tio Luis, who is not liked, as he is a crooked businessman and has been unfriendly to the family. He is also an aspiring politician trying to gain credibility in the community.

Tio Luis offers to buy the house from Mama, but at an amount much lower than it is worth. When she turns him down, he has a second proposal, this one of marriage. She loathes the idea and tells him so, but he reminds her that he is now her landlord, and he can make it very difficult on her if she does not accept his offer of marriage.

The next night, the family wakes to find their house on fire. All is lost, including the grapevines and Papa's beloved rose garden. Tio Luis arrives the next day to repeat his proposal, and to say that more harm could come to them if she doesn't reconsider his offer of marriage. She finally gives in, and he spreads the word to everyone in the area that they plan to wed.

To avoid the marriage, Mama and Esperanza go to the United States with their foreman, his wife, and their son. There they must find work in the fields, and Esperanza finds it especially difficult as she has led a sheltered and spoiled life to this point. Their life in a work camp is very hard, and mama becomes ill and must spend several months in the hospital. In order to help her get well, Esperanza must earn money to bring Abuelita from Mexico to be with her.

Her friend, Miguel, steals Esperanza's money and he disappears. Esperanza is very depressed at not being able to help her mother. Finally, Miguel returns with Abuelita after having gone to Mexico with Esperanza's money to bring Abuelita to California.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The story of Esperanza begins in 1924 when she is just six years old. She lives on a ranch in Mexico with her family where they own a large, successful vineyard. Her father loves the earth and often takes little Esperanza into the fields to lay their heads down on the earth to hear its heartbeat. The reader is taken immediately six years forward to when the grapes are almost ready for harvest. Esperanza, only weeks from her thirteenth birthday, begins the harvest with her father, whom she calls "Papa." Since she is an only child, and there is no son to carry on traditions, she is allowed to cut the first grapes of the harvest and ceremonially presents them to Papa.

The "La cosecha," or harvest ceremony, is attended her parents, Sixto and Ramona Ortega, and the servants, *vaqueros*, and *campesinos*. She is especially excited, as she knows that when the harvest is completed in three weeks, it will be a time of great celebration as it is also her birthday. At this time, it is traditional that her mother and father hold a *fiesta*, and her best friends will attend with their families. That means her best friend, Marisol Rodriguez, will come from the neighboring property where her father is a fruit rancher

The harvest ends and Esperanza goes to the garden for roses to decorate the tables of the fiesta and her birthday the next day. The garden had been painstakingly planted by Papa years ago and meticulously attended to. While picking the roses she cuts her finger on a thorn and it begins to bleed. She cries, "bad luck" and wraps the thumb in her apron as she watches the sun disappear and darkness begin. She feels a sense of uneasiness and worry as she goes to the house to meet Mama, and they both look towards the distance where Papa is late coming in from the fields. Both she and her mama are aware that there have been warnings of bandits in the area.

The Mexican Revolution has been over for ten years, but there are feelings of unrest. Resentment still flows towards the wealthy landowners while the poor are left with nothing, and even though Papa has been very sympathetic towards these peasants, even giving some of them their own land, there is still danger. Esperanza, Mama, and Abuelita, Esperanza's grandmother, are worried that he is not home yet. When Mama sees the cut from the thorn, she states that there is no rose without thorns. She, too, feels this is a bad omen.

While Esperanza and her grandmother crochet to make the time pass, Hortensia arrives with sandwiches. She is the housekeeper, who has attended the family for as long as Esperanza could remember. Hortensia's husband, Alfonso, who is the boss of the field workers, is sent with their son, Miguel, to look for Papa. The wait is to be long, however, and as Miguel rides off Esperanza remembers the time when she was much younger, and she told her father she planned to marry Miguel some day. Her father told her that



as she becomes older and understands life she would feel differently. He notes a wide river separates them in stature. Now, she understands.

Eventually riders return in the darkness. They are Tio Marco, the mayor, and Tio Luis, the bank president and are Papa's older stepbrothers. Esperanza has never cared for either of them, thinking they are cold and not at all like the rest of her family. They present Mama with Papa's silver belt buckle, which is engraved with the brand of the ranch. Soon a lantern light is seen in the distance. It is Alfonso and Miguel with a wagon carrying a body. It turns out to be Papa. Mama immediately faints as Esperanza falls to the ground in despair and disbelief.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The novel opens introducing the characters of the family and describes their almost idyllic life on a vineyard in Mexico near the Sierra Madre Mountains called El Rancho de las Rosas. Esperanza's life is described in detail with servants and people, who care for her surrounding her. The reader gets a glimpse of a Mexico still reeling from the Mexican Revolution of 1920. Wealthy people are still shunned by some peasants, who see them as noncaring pompous people with little regard for those they feel are beneath them. While it is obvious that Esperanza's family is not among these, we are given the sense that more change must be made for the country towards equality or the peasants will create difficulty once again. Thus, the plot begins to form.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Remembering the events of the night before, Esperanza wakes to a gloomy and empty house on her birthday. When someone knocks at the door, Esperanza opens it for Senor Rodriguez, her best friend's father and a friend of her father since schooldays. He delivers some papayas that had been ordered for the fiesta today. Since he has not heard the news, she tells him about her father's death the night before. For three days, people from all over the region arrive with food and flowers, and to grieve with Esperanza's family. While she spends what time she can alone with her friend, Marisol, most often she must greet visitors with the same dignity as her mother does. Ignoring her gifts for a few days, Esperanza finally opens her birthday presents to find a porcelain doll her father had gotten for her. She immediately forgets her other presents and hugs the doll as though it were her closest remembrance to Papa.

During this time, Tio Luis and Tio Marco are constantly in Papa's study going over the affairs of the ranch. They make everyone else on the ranch uncomfortable, and Esperanza is especially unhappy when she notices that Tio Luis wears Papa's belt buckle on his belt. At this time, a lawyer arrives to settle the affairs of the ranch, and he announces that Ramona (Mama) will receive the house and its contents and the income from the grapes. However, since it is not customary for women to own property, the land will be the property of the bank and Tio Luis. Tio Luis offers to buy the house from Esperanza's mother at a very low cost. When Mama refuses, he offers to marry her and together they would live in the house and become powerful and wealthy. He mentions he plans to enter politics and run for state governor, and hints again that she would be a very lucky lady to wed him.

Esperanza's mother loathes the idea and turns Tio Luis down. He notes that her house and her crops are now on his land, and, if she does not reconsider, he will make it very difficult on her. She realizes that it is not the house he is really after, but her respect and influence in the community. Pairing with her would greatly help with his political plans.

That night, Mama, Abuelita, Alfonso and Hortensia discuss whether the income from the grapes can maintain the house and the servants. Esperanza and Miguel listen silently, and finally go to Papa's rose garden and sit together and talk of the events. They note the roses that had been planted for each of them. There's a large orange one for him and delicate pink for her. It is the first time they have been together for many years, and they become close in a very short time. Miguel finally admits that he has heard rumors in town that Tio Luis plans to take over the entire ranch. He says that he and his parents have been considering moving to the United States, because they have lost faith in Mexico.



Chapter 2 Analysis

The characters and their motives become clearer in Chapter 2. There is a hint that there will be some major changes in the lives of many of the characters we have met so far. A slight reference is made to the corrupt environment in Mexico as the brothers begin a plot to take over the ranch, using their power and position to pave the way. While it becomes a possibility that Miguel and his family may move to the United States, it also opens the door for Esperanza and Miguel to resume the relationship they had when they were very young without knowledge or understanding that they were from every different backgrounds. Esperanza's father once told her that a wide river separates them.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

That night Esperanza has a dream that she is being awakened by a bear that is shaking her. She wakes to her mother's screams that the house is on fire, and they must leave at once. Upon arriving outside, they find servants, *vaqueros*, and *campesinos* running everywhere. However, Abuelita is nowhere outside. Miguel finds and comforts Esperanza, and then runs back inside the house, looking for Abuelita. He finally returns from the burning house, carrying her over his shoulder. She is weak and has hurt her ankle, but is otherwise all right. She had returned to retrieve her crocheting. They all watch as El Rancho de las Rosas, the roses, and the grapes continue to burn.

The next morning Esperanza searches the burned ruins for any of her things, but in vain. Soon, her uncle, Tio Luis, rides his horse to their home to talk to them once again. After briefly consoling them, he repeats his proposal to Esperanza's mother, telling her that he will build her a bigger and better home, if she will marry him. He mentions that she now has many people including her mother, who will have no place to live and no work as the crops are gone, and their futures depend upon her decision. Mama looks into the faces of the servants and realizes Tio Luis is right, and quietly tells him that she will reconsider his proposal. As he leaves, he looks at Esperanza and says that he will look into a boarding school for her far from the ranch where she can be taught better manners.

Esperanza's mother understands she cannot stay or the servants' quarters will be burned also, and that the evil influence of the Tio brothers extends far into Mexico so she would be forced to live in dire poverty. Alfonso tells her his family has already decided to move to California to work in the farms there, so they would no longer be there to support her.

After some thought about the consequences, Mama asks if she, Esperanza, and Abuelita could accompany them to the United States to work in the farms. Alfonso agrees but reminds them that all must be kept a secret as it will greatly embarrass Tio Luis for them to leave, and he will do anything to stop them from entering the United States. Abuelita assures them it is all right to start over. They will work hard and may have some hardships, but at least they will stay together. However, she says she must remain in Mexico for now until her ankle is better, she has strength to travel, and can get copies of her papers in order. She will follow soon. Esperanza smiles and says that even she will try to help in the fields.

The next day, a wagon carrying Abuelita's sisters comes for her. They are nuns and will care for Abuelita, until they get duplicates of papers that will allow her to enter the United States, and until she strengthens. As she leaves, Mama assures her she will return for her, and Abuelita gives a parting gift of the crochet work to Esperanza. Esperanza turns around and notices a trunk from the convent that the nuns have left.



Her mother says it contains clothes for the poor, who cannot afford to buy their own. Esperanza cries that this is not a good time for them to be donating their things to the poor, that there are other more important things to think about. Then, Esperanza's mother tells her that these things are not for others. They are for themselves, as they are now poor.

When Tio Luis arrives to get the answer about marriage from Mama, Esperanza's mother tells him she will marry him, but that there are two provisions. First, he must immediately begin to replant the crops, and, second, that she needs a wagon to visit her mother at the convent. Tio Luis agrees to both.

Before the marriage can take place, Esperanza and her mother, along with Alfonso, Hortensia, and Miguel, sneak away from the ranch for the last time with only the possessions they can carry. As they leave, Esperanza looks back at the trail of figs she has smashed as they walk away.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Miguel becomes a more important character. He begins to take a more prominent role as the possible hero, as he is shown helping Abuelita, becoming more caring towards Esperanza, and leading the way from the ranch. For the first time, Esperanza is shown to be somewhat spoiled, and assumes they will have a beautiful new home in California. Esperanza's naivety is shown when she states that even she might help on the farms once they reach the United States. This creates a new twist to her previously near perfect character, and the reader sees in more detail how difficult the trip and change in her life will be for her.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The group arrives at the Rodriguez ranch to find the wagon Mama has requested hidden in the barn. Its floor has been raised enough so that Mama, Esperanza, and Hortensia can lie down and hide inside. Esperanza is unhappy with the idea of being uncomfortable, but reluctantly scoots into the wagon with her mother and Hortensia. Guavas are packed in after them to hide their presence further. She is told that danger of the bandits is great and women cannot safely travel at night in Mexico.

To quell her fear, Hortensia begins to recall for them a time in the past when she and Esperanza were forced to hide under a bed while thieves stole their silver. When Esperanza began to move and makes a sound, Miguel dropped a mouse on the floor that he had previously hidden to scare Esperanza. The thieves were in the bedroom and close to discovering the two under the bed as the mouse ran around in circles and distracted the renegades, who left the house shortly with their loot. As payment for saving the two, Papa said he would give Miguel anything he wanted. Miguel wanted to go on a train ride more than anything, so that was the gift Papa gave to him. Esperanza and Papa accompanied Miguel on the train, and the children were given lunch on a table covered with linen, fine silver, and crystal. Their trip was to Zacatecas, the same trip they would take when the wagon arrived at the train station.

After two days, they all arrive in Zacatecas. Esperanza is tired, smells of Guavas, and unhappy that her second hand dress does not fit properly. Nonetheless, she is excited about the train ride. She supposes that it will be like the one with her father and Miguel. She is very disappointed. They board a smelly car with rows and rows of wooden seats already full of peasants, beggars, trash, and farm animals. Esperanza has never before been so close to so many filthy people. At her school, all the other children had been much like herself. Esperanza feels very uncomfortable here, and tells the others that they cannot continue like this. Mama explains that this is all they can afford, but Esperanza still feels the experience is beneath her.

To pass the time Esperanza takes the porcelain doll from her luggage. Immediately a dirty little girl rushes over to touch the beautiful white doll, but Esperanza quickly pulls it away from her, causing the little girl to run back to her mother crying. When Mama apologizes to the girl's mother Esperanza is extremely surprised. Esperanza and her mother make a little doll out of yarn and present it to the dirty little girl, who takes it and returns to her mother smiling.

The train ride becomes very long and uncomfortable. Esperanza is even more disgusted with the situation, especially since Miguel seems to be almost enjoying the trip. He tells her he is very excited and that in the United States even poor people can become rich if they work hard. After four days, a lady gets on the train and sits across from them with a wire cage containing six hens. The lady, whose name is Carmen,



offers candy to Esperanza. Esperanza is surprised when her mother allows her to take a piece from such a poor lady. Carmen tells them that her husband died and left her alone with eight children to care for. When they find that she does this by selling eggs, they are somewhat surprised and ask the lady how she does this. Carmen replies that she is poor in money but rich with the lives of her children. Esperanza is even more disappointed when her mother and Carmen become friends and begin telling each other about their private lives in great detail. She asks her mother how she can do this, and she replies that it is all right now as they are peasants also. Esperanza continues to be more ashamed of her situation.

Before leaving the train, Carmen gives Mama two chickens in a paper bag, and a coin to a beggar beside the tracks. Miguel takes a seat next to Esperanza and points out that rich people only take care of those who are also rich, but the poor take care of those who are even poorer than they are.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Two characters are more clearly outlined in this chapter. Esperanza is portrayed more fully as a spoiled girl, who certainly has no concept of the differences between the poor and the rich. She also continues to resist the concept that her life has changed, and she is slow to understand the true character of many of the poor peasants. At the same time, Miguel's understanding of life in general and the wide gap in the life styles between the rich and poor is expanded. He also begins to be shown as somewhat of a philosopher in some of his statements relating to this difference.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Esperanza's discomfort continues, when they arrive at the United States border in Mexicali. She notices the people in the front cars of the train are hurried through customs while those in the rear are herded into a dirty room to wait for their formal immigration review. Mama shows some of her previous class and intelligence by insisting they all have jobs and correct papers allowing them to enter, and they are finally allowed to board a train for the completion of their trip. Miguel and his father, Alfonso, are almost late boarding as they leave to get water for a small package they secretly carry on and off at each stop.

Finally arriving in Los Angeles, they are met by Alfonso's brother, Juan, his wife, Josefina, and their three children, all of whom are obviously *campesinos*. Before boarding their truck for the long ride to their new home, Esperanza is questioned by the oldest daughter of Juan and Josefina, whose name is Isabel. Isabel is a frail girl with dirty clothes that don't fit properly. She immediately asks if it is true that Esperanza is wealthy and spoiled. Esperanza is very hot while riding in the back of the open truck that looks like it is supposed to be hauling animals to market. During the ride, Isabel tells of what their life has been like recently, sometimes living in tents with no water, plumbing, or facilities to cook inside. Now, she tells them, they have a cabin that costs seven dollars a month and has cold running water and electricity inside. She says this as if it is a luxury.

As they stop for lunch, Esperanza leaves the others to feel sorry for herself and remembers her father. It causes her to cry. Miguel approaches her, takes her hand, and tells her not to be ashamed, that he misses her father also.

They continue in the old truck to the San Joaquin Valley where there are no mountains. All they see are rows and rows of grapevines and cantaloupes. After stopping to pick up cantaloupes left in the field as unfit, they pick up another girl, whose name is Marta. She asks Esperanza if she is the princess, who is going to become a peasant, and wants to know where the nice things Esperanza has are. She also tells them her father died fighting against wealthy people such as Esperanza's father. She continues to talk of their new lives, and Miguel listens intently. She notes how different nationalities are kept in separate camps and communications between them is discouraged for fear of organized opposition to their living conditions. Esperanza becomes annoyed that this peasant girl feels she can just continue to do all the talking in the presence of people who are above her. To make it worse, as they part, Marta tells Esperanza that no one will be waiting on her here. This is not Mexico.



Chapter 5 Analysis

Esperanza's character continues to develop as a spoiled rich girl, and she continues to deny that fact. Her relationship with Miguel continues to grow, and the philosophical side of him grows also. The introduction of Marta adds additional conflict for Esperanza, and we begin to get a sense that this conflict will be very deep and with many facets. The episode with Carmen, the poor lady, who is happy just to be able to support her eight children by selling a few eggs, represents to the reader one of the most important points of the story. Wealth is not from money but from family relationships.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

As the family arrives at their new home, Marta jumps out of the truck and starts talking in English, pointing at Esperanza, and laughing with her friends. Esperanza feels very uncomfortable, not being used to this kind of ridicule. As they are shown their extremely meager cabin, Esperanza continues to loudly complain that there is not enough room, everything smells like onions, and they will be living like horses. In the adjacent room, Hortensia and Alfonso hear her and stop talking. So, Mama shuts the door, sits Esperanza down on a creaky cot and begins to explain to her that they made the choice to be here, and they must make the best of it. It is better, she tells her, than being with Tio Luis, and also that she has the choice of being happy or not being happy. Esperanza vows that she will try to be happy. Isabel comes in to visit Esperanza and asks what it was like to be rich. Without thinking too much, Esperanza tells her that her grandmother will arrive soon with money and that they will build beautiful houses and have people working for them. She tells Isabel that this is only temporary for them to live like this.

The next morning Esperanza and Isabel are left to care for the two babies while the rest of the family goes to work. Only Miguel does not stay, as he goes with some men to find work on the railroad. As Isabel shows Esperanza the camp, a little girl runs up to them. With very dirty hands, she grasps Esperanza's hand and begins to walk with them. Esperanza's first thought is to pull away and go wash her hands, but she remembers how her mother treated the little girl on the train, so she lets the little girl hold on to her.

When they return to the cabin, Isabel tells Esperanza that they must now change the babies' diapers and do the laundry. Esperanza halfheartedly tries, but she is shocked to learn that next week Isabel will be returning to school, and she will have to care for both babies and do the laundry all by herself. She has never even seen laundry being washed before, but she decides she will learn. If an eight-year-old girl can do it, surely she can also.

Esperanza's next job is to sweep onionskins from the platform, where work is done and festivals are held. She has never even held a broom before, and looks very clumsy trying. She turns around to hear women laughing and sees Marta pointing at her and calling her Cinderella. Embarrassed, she runs back to her cabin in tears. Soon Miguel arrives with a broom and dustpan. He comforts her and tells her she should not be embarrassed, she has never been taught how to sweep. So he teaches her. She asks how his search for work on the railroad went, and Miguel tells her it is frustrating, because only certain labor jobs are given to Mexicans. He decides to work in the fields, until he can get some contacts to help him.



Chapter 6 Analysis

While Esperanza is seen at the beginning of this chapter continuing her whining, her mother finally sits her down and begins a lecture that appears to help Esperanza change her attitude for the better. This lecture appears to be a major turning point in the life of Esperanza. The conflict between her and Marta grows, and she has two issues that portray her ultimate change. She agrees to her mother to try to be more pleasant, and convinces herself that she must learn new skills in order to survive in the camp. Her relationship with Miguel remains in the background, but we get a sense that she has more respect for him and is more open to her feelings of letting him help her.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The group eats together after their first long day of work, and then Alfonso and Miguel announce a surprise. They take everyone outside behind the cabin where they have planted a few tiny rose bushes near a plastic statue of Our Lady of the Guadalupe. The rest of the family is astonished to learn that these are cuttings from Papa's roses. And, the roses for Esperanza and Miguel are there, all having survived the fire.

The first Saturday evening brings excitement for everyone, as it is the day of the *jamaica* or camp party. The women are especially excited and prepare to bathe and put on their finest clothes. Baths are very different here as all the women bathe together. Esperanza is happy to finally get a chance to get clean all over, and she begins by waiting with her arms outstretched for Hortencia to undress and bathe her, much to the surprise of the other ladies present. This embarrasses Esperanza further as she soon learns what Marta had said is true. Here no one will wait on her. Esperanza continues to try to adjust to her new situation by helping carry water to the baths, and even enjoys the closeness of all the women in their happiness. Biting into an almond she has just shelled, Esperanza asks if Marta and her friends will be at the *Jamaica*. She is told that they will be.

That night Esperanza goes to her first camp party. Hundreds of people are there, some from other camps all enjoying music, dance, and wonderful food. One group is giving away kittens, and Isabel wants one. Esperanza finds Isabel's mother and gets permission for Isabel to have one, but on the way back to tell her, she comes across a truck where Marta is standing and talking to a large group of people. Holding up one of the kittens, she compares it to their own plight as small, meek animals afraid to speak up for themselves. Throwing it into a ditch, Marta and her friends leave yelling for everyone to strike during the middle of cotton picking in two weeks.

After the *Jamaica*, Esperanza learns that many of the people in the camp are unhappy with Marta and her friends for stirring up the people and trying to get them to strike. She learns that many, like Juan and Josefina, are happy with their way of life here, and that things are much worse in many other camps. Also, she knows if they strike, people from other areas like Oklahoma will step in and take their jobs. Things are very difficult in Oklahoma as there is a draught and no crops to harvest, so any job for those people is better than what they now have. Still, she learns that Marta and many others think they will get more money and better housing, if they all strike together.

In bed later that night, Esperanza's mother tells her how proud she is of her and that she realizes she is trying.



Chapter 7 Analysis

The author begins to give us a sense the group is beginning to adjust to their surroundings, and that Esperanza has begun trying to change her life into the model her mother has provided her. Also, Esperanza demonstrates her courage to confront and challenge her own difficulties, and begins to learn more of the facts that lead people into the lifestyle she now shares with them, thus allowing her to accept them more equally.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Esperanza spends her first day alone with the two babies. At first, she is proud of herself and that she is at least contributing in some way. However, she gives the babies raw plums that make them sick. To make matters worse, she forgets to add water to the pot of beans on the stove as she was asked, so they are burned and the pot blackened. She saves most of the beans, and remembers when she was little and sick Hortensia would give her rice water. She makes some for the babies and that seems to help them, and her day ends a little better than it started.

Late in the summer, her friends Melina and Irene come to her cabin for a visit. The grapes are ripe at this time, and everyone works seven days each week to get them picked before fall. Esperanza is glad for the company, since otherwise she would be alone for days at a time. Soon the sky begins to darken, and quickly a dust storm blasts the cabin. All inside are covered with dust, and when Esperanza's mother gets home she is beginning to cough from being outside with so much wind and dust in the air. Everyone finally gets back to the cabin all right, but exhausted and very dirty. Esperanza asks about the strike that was planned for that day. Alfonso tells her that there was no strike because of the storm. And now the cotton plants are all ruined so there is no work for those who pick cotton anyway. Esperanza and the others are glad to hear that the storm did not affect the grapes, and that they will return to the fields tomorrow to continue harvesting them.

In a short time, the grapes have all been picked and the families are talking of the coming of the potato harvest. The cycle seems to never change to Esperanza. Only the needs of the earth change. Her mother has changed. Ever since the storm, she has become even sicker and continues to cough all the time.

A month passes and Esperanza's mother continues to worsen. She refuses to see a doctor, because they are so expensive. Finally, she gets a terrible fever and cannot be wakened, so a young American doctor is summoned to the camp. He is grim after seeing Mama, and announces she has valley fever. He explains to them that the fever is caused by dust spores, which get into your lungs, and that most people can fight off the infection. However, some people get very ill and cannot recover. Esperanza cannot believe what she is hearing. After the death of her father, surely this cannot be happening to her.

Chapter 8 Analysis

We begin to see a new side to Esperanza. She makes mistakes, but, for the first time, begins to solve them on her own. It is also noted that the babies she is caring for adore her, and her duties as their babysitter are being accomplished very well. Another point is

made, as justice seems to be served for the time being as those who preached for a strike lose their jobs, not to the boss, but to the weather. And last, Mama begins to lose strength and we find this is further challenge for Esperanza when we learn that her mother will no longer be able to work.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

After a few weeks of care, the doctor returns to see Mama once more. He tells them she is not getting worse, then darkens the mood by saying that she is no better either. One day when her mother is very sick, she asks Esperanza to get her the crocheting Abuelita began the night of Papa's death. Esperanza gets it and it smells of the fire. It also contains some hair from Abuelita that has been woven into the beginnings of a blanket that Abuelita asked them to finish for her. This brings back memories of the fire to them both. They cry and Mama makes Esperanza promise to take care of her. So Esperanza begins to work on the blanket, and she finds it is easier than it was when she first began it. Her fingers are more nimble, and she has more control of her stitches. Remembering how she was taught to pretend the stitches go up one side of a mountain and down the other, she compares it to her life in the valley where she now lives. She continues to work on the blanket, wondering if she will ever get out of the valley, and if her mother will ever get well. Then, she purposefully weaves some of her own hair into the blanket.

By the time the doctor arrives again, Mama has worsened, and he explains that she needs to go to a hospital. Her physical condition is deteriorating, and she also is depressed. However, Esperanza cries that her mother is not going to a hospital, since hospitals are where people go to die. However, the others convince her that the doctor is right, and she finally agrees to let her mother go to the hospital in Bakersfield to get better.

Esperanza is not allowed to stay at the hospital, so she rides back to the camp in the truck. Since Mama appears to be depressed, Esperanza decides she needs something to cheer her up, and the only thing she can think of that will really help is getting Abuelita reunited with Mama. Doctors' bills have taken their savings, so she has no money to help, and assumes Abuelita cannot get her own money from the bank with Tio Luis watching over it. Her solution is to get work herself so she can pay for Abuelita's trip from Mexico to the camp.

Esperanza's first job is cutting eyes from potatoes and putting them into bags to be planted in the fields. She is very concerned about doing a good job, as that is the only way she can continue to get work. Plus, she knows she is too young to be doing this work, so it is very important that she do the work well and not attract attention to herself.

On Christmas day, Esperanza goes to the hospital to visit Mama, but she is very weak and doesn't wake during her entire time there. She just sleeps. Esperanza leaves the only present she can get for Mama, a smooth stone she has found in the fields.



Chapter 9 Analysis

Esperanza continues to become more responsible, showing the true strong character she has inherited from her parents. She takes on more responsibility as she realizes it is her only hope to help Mama, and we begin to get a more intimate vision of the workings of the women inside the camp as they accept her more. The possibility of a strike in the spring keeps a gloomy cloud over Esperanza and many others, and we get a sense of possible violence looming in the future in the form of a possible clash between groups within the various camps.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Hortensia shows Esperanza how to make a salve from avocados to help heal her hands from all the hard work of cutting potatoes in the cold. It helps some, but she realizes her hands will never again be those of a rich matron of a successful ranch. In the meantime, Mama continues to get weaker, and the doctor tells Esperanza her mother has pneumonia, and she should discontinue her visits for a while so as not to bring any more contagious diseases into the hospital. Before she leaves Mama, she carefully braids Mama's hair and once more promises to take care of her.

In the early spring, Esperanza and Miguel go to the market for groceries. They have been told to go to Mr. Yakota's market, even though it is much farther than some others. Miguel explains that Mr. Yakota is friendly to Mexicans, while some other market owners are not. He says many people see all Mexicans as uneducated, dirty, poor, and unskilled, and treat them with disrespect. Esperanza is somewhat surprised at this, as she has had little contact with people outside their camp. However, she had heard from others in the camp that in the towns, there were separate sections for different racial groups, and white people didn't want their children to associate with them. Even the schools were segregated.

At the market Esperanza looks at all the foods for the oriental people as well as those for Mexicans. Along with groceries, she buys another small money order and a small donkey *pisata* for her mother, and stuffs it with caramels as Miguel drives them back to camp. He asks what the money order is for, and she explains she has been buying them and hiding them in her valise regularly so she will have money to bring Abuelita from Mexico. On the way, they pass Marta and her mother walking along the road, and give them a ride. Marta explains that they are not welcome in some camps because of their views on strikes, but they refuse to give the idea up as they feel their living conditions and the low wages are disgusting. When they arrive at the strikers' camp, Esperanza and Miguel are surprised to see that it is bordered with chain link fence and guarded by men wearing armbands. The camp is deplorable. There are only a few outdoor toilets for hundreds of workers, women are washing clothes in irrigation ditches, and there is no electricity and very few tents. Many people live outside and sleep on the ground with goats. When a poor family approaches them and asks for food, Esperanza gives them beans, and she gives the *pisata* to their two children.

Marta asks Esperanza if she is not already on the side of the strikers, and Esperanza tells her that she understands their situation, but that she must continue to work to help her mother. With that, Marta's mother says that everyone does what has to be done and that her mother would be proud of her. Marta says that, although they don't look it, the strikers are very organized. When the asparagus harvest begins in a few weeks, workers all over the country will strike, shutting down even the railroads. She says if they haven't joined the strikers by then to watch out.



A few days later Miguel announces he has gotten a job at the machine shop at the railroad. As so many of the workers have gone on strike, he is able to get the job of his dreams, but Esperanza knows the strike threatens her job and what she is trying to do for her mother and Abuelita.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Esperanza continues to mature and gain more knowledge of the overall situation facing migrant and very poor workers. Her maturity comes from the understanding she gains about the contrasts these people face. As her experiences broaden, so does her tolerance of the people she has now become. The reader begins to see her acting more and more like them. Her relationship to Miguel continues to strengthen slightly, but a conflict begins to form, as he gains from the strike just as Esperanza fears she may lose from it.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

As asparagus season begins, the strikers become public, handing out fliers and painting slogans on buildings. One morning, when Esperanza, Hortensia, and Josefina are ready to go the fields, they find a man with a gun, who is there to protect them and the truck. Arriving at the worksite they are met by many women who yell for them to strike and help them band together, so all can benefit from the strike. They know that by slowing down the harvest the young asparagus plants will die from the hot sun that is sure to come soon. However, the three continue to work, as they have no choice.

As the days wear on, the strikers become more aggressive, not only taunting the workers but also sabotaging some of the asparagus bundles with snakes, rats, and sharp objects.

The women learn the men in the fields face the same problems. In town at the railroad, Miguel does also. To make things even worse, many people arrive from other areas each day willing to do the labor for less than those already here. At dinner one evening, Esperanza tells the others that the strikers have a point. If people keep working for less and less, everyone will starve. She is asked which side she is on and Esperanza is not sure.

A few days later, a caravan of buses and police cars arrives at the shed, looking for illegal immigrants. The strikers run into the fields followed by police with clubs. Esperanza is very worried the officials will take the women in the shed and put them into the buses along with the strikers, but she is told the growers need the workers, and they will be left alone. It is true. Even those strikers with papers making them legal to be there are thrown into the buses, their papers torn up and thrown away. Esperanza is told the buses will carry the people to Los Angeles where they will be put on trains bound for El Paso, Texas and then on to Mexico. Later that morning Esperanza discovers a person hiding among some boxes behind the shed where she is working. It is Marta, who begs not to be turned in. Esperanza is concerned, because she knows if it is found out that she has helped a striker at all, she will be sent back to Mexico with the others. She also remembers the day she met Marta and how mean she was. However, when Marta begs and says she must stay to take care of her mother, Esperanza decides not to turn her in. Instead, she gets an apron and some asparagus, which she gives to Marta with a warning to wear the apron, so the guards will think she is a worker.

The next day she gets Miguel to drive by the striker's camp. It is deserted except for a goat still tied to a tree. As they prepare to leave, Esperanza spots the little donkey *pisata* swinging in the wind. It has been beaten and broken open by the children.



Chapter 11 Analysis

The conflict between the strikers and those in Esperanza's camp escalates. In this chapter there is a continuing thread of commonality in the two groups' struggles and goals but there is a feeling that Esperanza may be forced to make a decision on which side to support. Some sympathy is created with both sides, but a new villain is introduced as the immigration officers become the enemy of the strikers. Ultimately they force more difficult living conditions on those who remain loyal to the growers and give Esperanza and her friends additional reason to be concerned about their futures.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

In the middle of April Esperanza learns that Isabel may become the Queen of May Day at her school. Isabel has straight A's and is the only girl in her class to do so. The girl with the best grades is supposed to be Queen of May Day. However, Esperanza learns that no Mexican or Japanese girl has ever been chosen to get this honor no matter how good her grades have been.

A week later they all learn that a new house is to be built for families from Oklahoma and it is rumored it will have indoor toilets, hot water, and a swimming pool. It is said the Mexicans will be able to use the pool only on Friday afternoons right before they clean in on Saturday mornings. That evening when Miguel returns home from work it is discovered that a group of men from Oklahoma asked for work at the railroad, and the whole group was hired. Miguel's job was taken away, and he was given the choice of laying track, digging ditches, or leaving with no pay. He dug ditches all day. When Esperanza learns he agreed she is furious. It seems the Mexicans get only what others don't want, and that is not why they came to the United States. She runs out of the cabin with Miguel following her. Miguel tells her that he will continue to work for the railroad, because there is always some hope for him here in the United States. Unlike in Mexico, where he was a second-class citizen and always would be, here he has a chance to rise out of poverty and illiteracy. He lectures Esperanza that she has never known the hopelessness he felt in Mexico as she was always on the other side of the river. However, Esperanza argues that he is still a second-class citizen, because he will not stand up for himself and his beliefs. The next morning Miguel is gone. He is off to northern California to look for work with the railroad, and Esperanza feels it is her fault. She prays that nothing will happen to him.

On the day the Queen of May Day is to be chosen the first load of peaches arrives at the shed where Esperanza is working. She takes a bag home, as she is afraid the news will be bad for Isabel, and wants something to give her to help ease the pain. When Esperanza gets close to home Isabel is waiting with the news that her teacher selected someone else. Her teacher said she selects the Queen on more than grades. Esperanza tells her not to be so sorry, that being Queen only lasts for a day. With this she opens her valise and takes out the porcelain doll she had been given by her father the day after he died. Esperanza presents it to Isabel and tells her that this doll is now hers and it will last for more than a day.

Mama has been in the hospital for five months. When Esperanza and Hortensia next go to the hospital to see her, the doctor has good news, Mama will be able to go home in a week. So preparations are made and upon her arrival at the camp many people come to congratulate her and wish her well. Esperanza does not let them stay too long for fear of her mother getting too tired, and later that evening when Esperanza and Mama are



alone Esperanza tells her she has a surprise for her. She goes to where her money is hidden only to find it all missing.

Chapter 12 Analysis

In chapter twelve the reader continues to hear the author's message that things are not equal for minorities and whites. Isabel does not get to be Queen of May Day, a new camp is to be built for people from Oklahoma that is far better than the one for Mexicans, and Miguel loses his job to unskilled laborers from Oklahoma. There is some turnaround in the darkness of their situation as Mama is allowed to come home from the hospital, but it is offset by Miguel leaving and we are given a hint that he may be responsible for Esperanza's money that is missing.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

A few weeks later Mama is still improving. New crops are coming in including peaches, plums and nectarines. At work one day just after noon, Esperanza is surprised to see Alfonso talking to one of her supervisors. She is worried he is coming with bad news of Mama, but he tells her he has heard form Miguel, and they are to meet him at the bus station in Los Angeles. Alfonso says he knows nothing else, but Esperanza and Hortensia are to go with him to pick up Miguel.

When Miguel gets off the buss and greets everyone, Esperanza asks him if he has come to return what he has stolen. He says no, but he has something better. With that he turns and helps a frail Abuelita from the bus. There is a wonderful homecoming for Abuelita at the camp, and she meets all the people who are now part of Mama and Esperanza's lives. Esperanza brings out the blanket she has been crocheting and it is big enough for three beds. The last row is unfinished, and Esperanza begins to finish it, remembering the words to go up the mountain and down the other side as she crochets.

A few days before her birthday she and Miguel go to a hilltop just after dawn, and she shows him how to put his ear to the earth to hear its heartbeat. She feels very fulfilled and knows that the egg lady they met on the train was right. She has her family and her future, and that is all that matters. She remembers the day she, her father, and Miguel took the trip on the train. Now, as she remembers it, she sees that they are all on the same side of the river.

On the day of her birthday Esperanza wakes to the sound of men singing the birthday song outside her window. Later in the day she begins to show Isabel how to crochet with the same words her mother had used to teach her.

Chapter 13 Analysis

The final chapter completes the cycle of events much as the earth completes its seasonal cycle before starting over. Esperanza's life parallels that of the rising of the Phoenix. Just as Miguel turns out to be a hero for bringing Abuelita from Mexico after being the suspect of a crime, Esperanza turns her life around after being portrayed as a spoiled child, who has always been cared for. The cycle is also completed as Esperanza finished the blanket she had been crocheting and begins to teach Isabel how to crochet.



Characters

Esperanza

Esperanza grows up in Mexico on a vineyard with her parents, grandmother, and a large staff. Nearing her thirteenth birthday, she is excited about things relating to the future she assumes to have that will begin with her *Quinceaneras*, or coming of age party, that happens in two years when she turns fifteen. This includes the ability to wed and begin to become the head of a household, and the parties are very important to young Mexican girls her age. She has black hair that is wavy and thick, much like her mother's. While her lashes are the color of her hair, her skin is fair and creamy. At the beginning of the story she is shown in beautiful hand made dresses. As the story opens Esperanza is a spoiled child, who expects everyone to take of her, but she soon realizes how the loss of her wealth forces her to change and to become more responsible. Her looks and dress also change, as she begins to wear second hand clothes and changes her hairstyle to be able to wear hats while she works.

Sixto Ortega

"Papa," as he is called is Esperanza's father, who owns the ranch where she spends her first twelve years. He is called Papi or Papa and is the epitome of a loving, caring, father. He is pictured as a very fair man, who is loved by his family and workers alike. Very tall with a wide, graying mustache he appears successful but fair to all. Papa is one of the few wealthy landowners to treat the servants and others, who work for him respectfully.

Ramona Ortega

As Esperanza's mother (Mama) is introduced, we see the reflection of her father. Loving, caring, and proud, she is a true friend to all who know her. She is tall and elegant, and has long, black hair, usually braided in a circle around her forehead. Her large eyes are the color of almonds. She is also shown to be a fair person, who understands what suffering is like. She sympathizes with those who have less that she does. As she becomes ill her stature changes, and she becomes frail, her hair seems to get gray, and is unkempt, and she is forced to wear old clothes tossed off by others that do not fit nor show her previous stature.

Abuelita

The grandmother and eldest of the family, Abuelita, is well respected by the entire family and servants. She is often the hostess of formal afternoon tea parties but may be found as often barefoot in the garden. She always wears a lace handkerchief in her sleeve and sometimes a flower in her hair. She is a very philosophical person and interjects



many deep thoughts into conversations. She is portrayed as someone who holds influence over people even when she is not nearby. By the end of the story, she too, looks frail, but keeps her upbeat personality even during her physical demise.

Alfonso

As the boss or *el jefe* of the ranch operation under Papa, Alfonso is also his closest friend or *compañero*. He has very dark skin and long eyelids, along with a droopy mustache, which sometimes makes him look like a puppy. He is the one who helped Papa resurrect the rose garden that had been neglected for years. He talks continually of moving to the United States to be with his brother, but stays with Papa and the ranch out of loyalty.

He eventually moves to the United States and is content to do the work given him and to live the lifestyle available.

Hortensia

Alfonso's wife and the head housekeeper, Hortensia has been with Esperanza ever since she can remember. She is a Zapotec Indian from Oaxaca, who is short and stocky, and she wears her blue-black hair in a long braid down her back. Traveling with Esperanza and her mother to the United States, She slowly gives up the lifestyle and the duties associated with caring for Esperanza and works without complaint in the sheds with the other ladies.

Miguel

Miguel is the son of Alfonso and Hortensia. He is sixteen years old and taller than both of his parents even at the outset of the novel. He has grown up on the ranch and is a trusted worker, who knows the entire ranch by heart. Papa has let him learn the mechanics of the machinery on the ranch also, and he can fix anything and especially loves to repair anything with a motor. He is a very patient person. He has aspirations to go to the United States, where he says everyone is treated equally and can rise to be whatever they want to be, if they work hard. When the story begins he has drifted away from Esperanza with whom he played as a child. He becomes a friend again as times change and their living conditions worsen. He never gives up hope that he can make something better of himself in the United States that he was in Mexico.

Senor Rodriguez

Senor Rodriguez owns the property adjacent to El Rancho de las Rosas. He has been one of her father's best friends since they were schoolboys, and is a confident of her family. He will do anything possible to help Esperanza's family and does so when they find they must leave Mexico.



Marisol Rodriguez

Esperanza's best friend is a girl, named Marisol, who lives on the ranch next door. Her parents raise fruit, and the two girls spend Saturday's together imagining what their lives will be like when they are older, always assuming they will continue to live as they do now and oblivious to the fact that they are spoiled and very different from most other Mexican girls their age.

Tio Luis

Esperanza does not like Papa's stepbrother, Tio Luis. As the president of the bank he has not been friendly to her or the rest of her family. He is somewhat evil and has motives other than what he shows. Tio Luis represents much of what the peasants of Mexico are fighting against and will allow and even encourage corruption to get what he wants.

Tio Marco

Tio March is the younger brother of Tio Luis. He is also Papa's stepbrother, and mayor of the town. He is very stuffy and always business-like, and often takes orders from his older brother, even in business matters of the town.

Juan

Juan is Alfonso's brother, who helps them with jobs in the United States. He and his family are *campesinos*, who pick crops in the fields of California and live in the camp, where Esperanza and her family settle. He looks a great deal like Alfonso without the moustache. He is always willing to share whatever he has with the others in the family group. He appears content with his life and work in the United States, and has managed to work with companies that treat him better than many others. His philosophy is to do what he is told and not to complain.

Josefina

Josefina is Juan's wife and the mother of their three children. She is described as a happy person, plump and with a fair complexion. She is the one who trains Esperanza in the ways of life in the camp and how to work in the sheds with the other women. She appears to be friendly to everyone and tries to mind her own business in matters of the camp.



Isabel

Isabel is the oldest daughter of Juan and Josefina, and about eight-years-old. She is obviously poor, generally wearing a dress that is too large, and shoes with no socks. She is somewhat frail with skinny legs and large, round, brown eyes. Isabel adores Esperanza and constantly wants to hear what her life was like in Mexico. She teaches Esperanza how to care for the babies and how to wash clothes. These are things at which she is an expert, but which Esperanza has never been exposed to. She becomes a very close friend of Esperanza and seems much wiser than her eight years.

Lupe

Lupe is the baby daughter of Joan and Josefina, and the twin of Pepe. She wears tiny gold earrings and has dark hair. As does Pepe, she has dark brown eyes.

Pepe

The other twin of Juan and Josefina, Pepe looks almost like his twin sister, except for the earrings.

Marta

Marta lives on a camp farm near Esperanza's new home. Marta finds that Esperanza's father has died and that they have come to the fields to work. Marta states that her father too, died. He was fighting in the Mexican Revolution against wealthy landowners such as Esperanza's father. Marta is an intelligent person, not only in street savvy, but also in the ways of the political conditions both in the United States and in Mexico. She and her mother were both born in the United States so they are here legally, but there is constant fear they could be sent to Mexico if they are caught supporting the strikers. She constantly harasses Esperanza and Esperanza dislikes her for it. She has short, black, curly hair, and her features are somewhat pointed. Some of her philosophy finally rubs off onto Esperanza as she convinces her that if conditions continue to worsen no one will be able to make a living there.

Melina

Melina becomes a friend of Esperanza in the camp. She is not much older than Esperanza, but has a husband and a baby. She changes from being a friend like a schoolgirl to Esperanza to preferring to be with the older married ladies crocheting after dinner.



Objects/Places

El Rancho de las Rosas

El Rancho de las Rosas is the large vineyard owned by Sixto and Ramona Ortega in Aguascalientes, Mexico. It has thousands of acres and many servants, *vaqueros*, and *campesinos*. The chief crop is grapes, but they also have horses and some cattle. It has been in the Ortega family for generations.

Abuelita's Blanket

The night her father is killed, Esperanza begins to crochet a blanket for Abuelita. It eventually contains Abuelita's hair, her own hair, and that of her mother. The life of the blanket closely parallels that of Esperanza, her mother, and grandmother.

Porcelain Doll

Each year for her birthday, Esperanza gets a beautiful new doll. This one, the last gift Papa was to give her, is dressed in white lace and looks like an angel. It is much more valuable than most of the dolls Mexican girls have.

Train to Mexicali

The train they take to the United States is filthy. Instead of seats there are rows of wooden benches, it is littered with trash, and smells of rotten fruit and urine. It is filled with peasants, animals and chickens. The ride on this train embarrasses Esperanza, as she cannot believe her mother will allow them to experience this, and can't seem to understand that it is all they can afford.

The Secret Package

Alfonso and Miguel find some rose cuttings from Papa's garden, and they secretly take them in a paper package to the United States to start a rose garden. At each train stop they diligently take the package off the train to find water for it. A cutting from the roses Papa planted for Esperanza and Miguel are included.

Cabin

The family arrives at the camp in California and is given a cabin to live in. To Esperanza it resembles a horse stall. It has only two small rooms, and half of one is the kitchen.



Beds are mattresses on the floor of various types and sizes. The walls are covered with newspapers.

Jamaica

Each Saturday night, the people from several camps join to have a celebration. There is music, food, dancing, games, and much fun for everyone. It is called a *Jamaica*.

Strikers' Camp

The striker's camp is where Marta lives, surrounded by a tall chain link fence. There are no buildings, and only a few tents in which people can live. There are only ten outdoor toilets for hundreds of workers, no electricity, and water is available only from a long pipe with spigots sticking up from it. The smell in the entire area is terrible.

Workers' Sheds

Men bring crops from the field to the sheds after they are harvested. Women complete the process in the sheds, whether it be bundling or packing. This is also where the potatoes are cut into eyes to be planted again in the fields. The sheds represent hard labor, long hours, and much toil for them, but they are also a place of social interaction, news, and gossip.



Themes

Family Relationships

Esperanza's relationship to her father, mother, and grandmother forms the driving spirit of the plot. In her early childhood, her strongest relationship is with her father. He represents all she has become to that point, including wealth, class, refinement, success and education. The one difference is in his experience with life in general which has taught him to treat all people with respect. Esperanza has not had the occasion to mix with people who are not like herself, and does not understand that there is a need to associate with them other than for them to serve her in some way.

As the story progresses, Esperanza begins to learn from her relationship with her mother the need to accept people as they are. She also experiences the tolerance her mother has for those less fortunate and begins to take on some of those qualities herself.

Abuelita's influence over the family creates the need for them to reunite her with them. This need, in turn, gives Esperanza the initiative to change her attitude in order to be able to contribute to this cause.

The closeness of the other main characters creates an extended family, necessary for survival in the conditions in which they find themselves. Caring for each other in many ways creates the ties that are to allow for their very survival. Taking care of children, people who are ill, sharing food and clothing, and relationships with others are necessary on a daily basis. Everyone but the babies is assigned a duty that contributes to the family group as a whole.

Personal Hardship

The central theme of the story is one of rising above personal hardship. It is most obvious in Esperanza as we see her change out of necessity to reach her goal of getting her grandmother from Mexico to be with her family in California. As the spoiled daughter of wealthy landowners, she has only her stature and wealth to rely on. These lost, she must find an inner strength and embrace a new lifestyle in order to achieve her goals. In order to accomplish this, Esperanza must endure the personal hardship put upon her in order to rise out of it.

Esperanza does this by first accepting others as at least somewhat equal to herself. She accomplishes this by understanding what motivates them, and, in most cases, it becomes plain survival. This allows her to put aside some of her prejudices which in turn make it easier for her to become more like those she finds herself among and able to work and live alongside them.



In the character of Miguel we find many similarities to those of Esperanza, though they at first appear to be very different. At first it appears he is happy with his life working on El Rancho de las Rosas. He is a trusted employee and has been given a great deal of responsibility and allowed to educate himself in the repair of machinery. As the story progresses, however, we learn that his feelings towards the Ranch and the plight of the poor people in Mexico in general are far from satisfactory. He often makes statements that show his dissatisfaction with his status. He and his father are both aware that they were born poor in Mexico, and that there is very little hope of rising above this placement. His willingness to leave everything and go to the United States in order to be able to better himself are results of these feelings.

Conflict

There are many conflicts in the characters. Esperanza's initial conflict is with herself, as she must first accept the changes in her life before she can begin to address ways to control them. This is shown in the difficulty she has in accepting the fact that she is no longer wealthy. Later in the story she is torn between supporting those who would strike to make conditions better for all the workers and continuing to accept the plight in which she finds herself. She admonishes Miguel for not speaking out when his job at the railroad is given to a white person with no qualifications. However, we see that she is guilty of the same thing herself, but she justifies this with the explanation that she is doing the work for her mother and grandmother's benefit and cannot afford to create problems with those she works for.

We also see conflict between some of the characters themselves. Esperanza and Marta begin with opposing views of the wealthy, Esperanza taking this wealth for granted, and Marta assuming most wealthy people are uncaring and corrupt at the poor peoples' expense.

This same conflict is the source of the Mexican Revolutionary War that takes place ten years before the story begins, but manifests itself still in the daily lives of many Mexicans. People with little or no money are in a constant conflict with the wealthy who, in their eyes, have everything for very little effort.



Style

Points of View

The story is told in the third person, but largely through the vision of its main character, Esperanza. We are allowed to see the conflicts in the lives of the characters as she sees them and we tend to often think of ourselves and what we would do in the specific situations she finds herself in.

Esperanza's point of view changes drastically from that of not acknowledging her loss of status, to accepting what she has become, to sympathizing with both sides of the labor issues we are introduced to. Those sides consist of those who wish to leave things as they are, and those who wish to stride for better pay and more acceptable living conditions.

We also get some sense of viewpoint from Miguel. We realize he has been given a great deal by Papa, and is grateful for it. On the other hand, Miguel knows he has risen as far in the Mexican society as he is able, and must move on in order to accomplish additional goals.

Marta has one viewpoint for herself. That is to encourage strikers to organize and act in order to force the wealthy farmers to increase the standard of living and their wages. Only a slight variance is ever shown in this, and that is when she begs Esperanza not to turn her in and allow her to be sent to Mexico.

Setting

There are two main settings in this novel. They are El Rancho de las Rosas, and the labor camp in Arvin, California. These two locales are opposites in almost every way.

El Rancho de las Rosas is a large vineyard of several thousand acres near Aguascalientes, Mexico. The natural beauty of the area on and around the Ranch reflects that of its occupants, the Ortega family. In addition to their stately house, there are many cabins lined up neatly for the various people who work for them. A rose garden is a special feature, as it was done by previous generations of Ortegas. It was left unkempt for many years, until Sixto Ortega and his foreman, Alfonso, clean it and begin to create beautiful roses again. There are rolling hills covered with grapevines, and the neighboring area is a large fruit farm. The crop renews itself yearly and is harvested in August. Esperanza especially values the area, because it has been in her family for years, and it has always been a place of security and fondness for her.

However, the labor camp where she moves is a place of suffering and squalor, and we initially see it as almost inhabitable. Living quarters consist of a cabin with two rooms. There are a bedroom and a room that is half kitchen with the other half being used for eating, sleeping, recreation and entertaining. There is no furniture to speak of other than



a small table used to prepare food and to eat on, a few chairs, and several mattresses of different sizes laid out on the floor for sleeping. Most other furniture consists of packing crates. There is cold running water, but no bathroom facilities. Bathing is done communally in a tub where water is heated on the wood stove and then dumped into the tub for several bathers until it must be changed. Toilet facilities consist of communal outdoor wooden privies.

This camp begins as a hideous place for Esperanza. However, as changes take place in her life, changes appear to take place in the camp. There is a friendship among the occupants that offsets the gloom of the physical facilities. It becomes home.

Language and Meaning

A young reader will find the language easy to understand, and it is interesting and poignant enough for mid-level readers as well. Two basic types of language are apparent. The characters are mostly Hispanic, and, as such, speak Spanish. Of course, the book is written in English, however, the second language utilized is Spanish. Many quotations are written in Spanish, most with English translation. Also, important quotations and specific places are also given in Spanish. Chapters are defined interestingly as fruits and vegetables, relating to the time of year they are harvested. They are also in Spanish, but with the English transition. There are no chapter numbers.

Structure

There are thirteen chapters in the novel. The story is told in chronological order almost exclusively. One of the main themes of the story is the continuity of the order of things, particularly of the seasons. This is paralleled by the author in the sense that the characters follow a circular path in their adventures, as do the seasons. As a result, the harvesting of the ripe crops.

At some points of the story the characters are followed daily. In a few instances, there is a time lapse, but we are almost always given specifics of how long the lapses in the action have been. There are only three flashbacks of any significance in the events.

The novel is based on facts related to the author by her grandmother. Even most of the places are the actual places where her grandmother experienced them. The one differentiation from this being the name of the ranch, which was really *El Rancho de la Trinidad*.



Quotes

"*Aguantate tantito y la fruta caera en tu mano,*' he said. 'Wait a little while and the fruit will fall into your hand. You must be patient, Esperanza.'" Prolog, p. 2

"*No hay rosa sin espinas.* There is no rose without thorns." Chapter 1, Las Uvas, p. 14

"Now watch. Ten steps up to the top of the mountain. Add one stitch. Nine stitches down to the bottom of the valley. Skip one." Chapter 1, Las Uvas, Las Papayas, p. 14

"My father and I have lost faith in our country. We were born servants here and no matter how hard we work we will always be servants. Your father was a good man. He gave us a small piece of land and a cabin. But your uncles...you know their reputation. They would take it all away and treat us like animals. We will not work for them. The work is hard in the United States but at least there we have a chance to be more than servants." Chapter 2, Las Papayas, p. 36

"You were right, Esperanza. In Mexico we stand on different sides of the river." Chapter 2, Las Papayas, p. 37

"If you don't intend to marry him, Senora, you cannot stay here. He would burn down the servants' quarters next. There will be no income, because there are no grapes. You would have to depend on the charity of others, and they would be afraid to help you. You could move to some other part of Mexico, but in poverty. Luis's influence is far-reaching." Chapter 3, Los Higos, p. 46

"Do not be afraid to start over." Chapter 3, Los Higos, p. 49

"We are like the phoenix," said Abuelita. "Rising again, with a new life ahead of us." Chapter 3, p. 50

"I am poor, but I am rich. I have my children, I have a garden with roses, and I have my faith and the memories of those who have gone before me. What more is there?" Chapter 4, Las Guayabas, p. 76

"The rich take care of the rich and the poor take care of those who have less than they have." Chapter 4, Las Guayabas, p. 79

"Just so you know. This isn't Mexico. No one will be waiting on you here." Chapter 5, Los Melones, p. 99

"This is what we are!' she yelled. 'Small, meek animals. And that is how they treat us because we don't speak up. If we don't ask for what is rightfully ours, we will never get it! Is this how we want to live?'" Chapter 6, Las Almendras, p. 132

"We all do what we have to do. Your mother would be proud of you." Chapter 9, Los Aguacates, p. 195



Topics for Discussion

Discuss how the story of the phoenix rising from a pile of ashes to form a new life parallels Esperanza's life.

Trace the four main changes in Esperanza's life, beginning with her childhood in Mexico as a wealthy family's daughter.

Discuss the conflicts between the strikers and those workers who are satisfied to continue with their lives as they are.

Explore the statement, "The rich take care of the rich and the poor take care of those who have less than they have."

Review the contrasts between the strikers' camp and the one Esperanza and her family live in.

What is the significance of the chapters named after fruits and vegetables of the harvest?

As a reader of this story, what is the most significant thing you learned from this novel?

How do the lessons from *Esperanza Rising* relate to political and social issues in the early 21st century?