Book: Esperanza Rising by Pam Munoz Ryan

Reviewed by: Connie Bush

Level of Difficulty: Easy

My thoughts about the book and its suitability for my group:

Esperanza ("Hope" in English) is the much-beloved only daughter of Ramona and Sixto Ortega. As the story begins she is looking forward to the fiesta celebrating her thirteenth birthday. It is 1930 and her family lives on the expansive and beautiful El Rancho de las Rosas in Aguascalientes, Mexico. However, just beneath the surface of her peaceful, privileged life run currents of trouble and discontent springing from greed, jealousy and the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. As her circumstances change drastically, we see her grow into the new realities of life as a farm worker in the Central Valley.

This book offers many themes for discussion: family life, from toddlers to grandparents, and events in American history around the 1930's (farm worker strikes, the Dust Bowl, FDR's policies, immigration, class differences, discrimination).

Students’ reaction to the book:

As the title suggests, Esperanza and her family and new friends rise above their difficulties to make a good life. It's an uplifting story that doesn't minimize the realistic difficulties of life. The students liked it very much.

Tips for other tutors who may want to use this book:

This book is rated Easy. Even so the author is skilled at using vocabulary in engaging ways. She also sometimes uses words in a way that make for natural discussions about grammar or pronunciation. For example, she writes, "Esperanza stayed close to them, watching the growing crowd." She also sprinkles in Spanish words and phrases. She does a good job of giving the meanings in the context. One of my students tried out the Spanish he is learning on his gardener.