



The novel *Esperanza Rising* tells the story of a teenage girl from Mexico named Esperanza Ortega. Esperanza is the daughter of a wealthy landowner and lives a life of privilege. However, her life changes forever when her father dies. Esperanza and her mother move to California to escape problems at home. The difficult journey to Los Angeles introduces to Esperanza a new culture in which she must work hard for herself and for her family.

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**disembarked**  
left or got off

**panorama**  
view

**valises**  
bags

## Esperanza Rising

Pam Muñoz Ryan

They reached the border at Mexicali in the morning. Finally, the train stopped moving and everyone **disembarked**. The land was dry and the **panorama** was barren except for date palms, cactus, and an occasional squirrel or roadrunner. The conductors herded everyone into a building where they stood in long lines waiting to pass through immigration. Esperanza noticed that the people in the first cars were escorted to the shortest lines and passed through quickly.

Inside, the air was stagnant and thick with the smell of body odor. Esperanza and Mama, their faces shiny with grime and perspiration, looked tired and wilted and they slumped with even the slight weight of their **valises**. The closer Esperanza got to the front, the more nervous she became. She looked at her papers and hoped they were in order. What if the officials found something wrong? Would they send her back to her uncles? Would they arrest her and put her in jail?

The immigration official seemed angry for no reason. “Where are you coming from?”

“We are from Aguascalientes,” said Mama, stepping forward.

“And what is your purpose for entering the United States?”

Esperanza was afraid to speak. What if she said the wrong thing?

“To work,” said Mama, handing him her documents as well.

“What work?” demanded the man.

Mama's demeanor changed. She stood up straight and tall and deliberately blotted her face with a handkerchief. She looked directly into the official's eyes and spoke calmly as if she were giving simple directions to a servant. "I am sure you can see that everything is in order. The name of the employer is written there. People are expecting us."

The man studied Mama. He looked at their faces, then the pages, then their faces again.

Standing tall and proud, Mama never took her eyes from his face.

Finally, he grabbed the stamp and pounded each page with the words *Mexican National*. He shoved their papers at them and waved them through. Mama took Esperanza's hand and hurried her toward another train.

They boarded and waited an hour for all the passengers to get through immigration. Esperanza looked out the window. Across the tracks, several groups of people were being prodded onto another train headed back toward Mexico.

"My heart aches for those people. They came all this way just to be sent back," said Mama.

"But why?" asked Esperanza.

"Many reasons. They had no papers, false ones, or no proof of work. Or there might have been a problem with just one member of the family, so they all chose to go back instead of being separated."

Esperanza thought about being separated from Mama and gratefully took her hand and squeezed it. ❷

Almost everyone boarded except Alfonso, Hortensia, and Miguel. Esperanza kept looking for them, and she became more anxious with each passing minute. "Mama, where are they?"

Mama said nothing, but Esperanza could see worry in her eyes, too.

Finally, Hortensia got on. The train's engines began to chug.

Her voice tense, Esperanza said, "What happened to Alfonso and Miguel?"

Hortensia pointed out the window. "They had to find some water."

Alfonso was running toward the train with Miguel close behind, waving the secret package and grinning. The train slowly started moving as they hopped on.

Esperanza wanted to be angry at them for making her anxious. But looking from one to the other, she sat back, limp with relief, happy to have them all together surrounding her, and surprised that she could be so glad to be back on the train.

“Anza, we’re here. Wake up!”

She sat up groggily, barely opening her eyes. “What day is this?” she asked.

“You’ve been asleep for hours. Wake up! It is Thursday. We are in Los Angeles!”

“Look, there they are!” said Alfonso, pointing out the window. “My brother, Juan, and Josefina, his wife. And his children, Isabel and the twins. They have all come.”

There was much hugging among all the relatives.

“The truck is this way,” said Juan. “We have a long ride.”

Esperanza picked up her valise and followed Isabel’s father. She looked around and was relieved to see that, compared to the desert, Los Angeles had lush palms and green grass, and even though it was September, roses were still blooming in the flowerbeds. She took a deep breath. The aroma of oranges from a nearby grove was reassuring and familiar. Maybe it wouldn’t be so different here.

Juan, Josefina, Mama, and Hortensia crowded onto the front seat of the rickety truck. Isabel, Esperanza, Alfonso, and Miguel sat in the truck bed with the babies and the two red hens. The vehicle looked like it should be hauling animals instead of people, but Esperanza had said nothing to Mama. Besides, after so many days on the train, it felt good to stretch out her legs. ①



## Lesson 2 Vocabulary: *Esperanza Rising*

### Words From the Story

#### barren

In Esperanza's story, the land and panorama at the border at Mexicali is barren. A barren place is empty, dry, or unable to grow things.

- Which might be barren, a desert or a lake?
- Could a nest be considered barren?

#### demeanor

When the immigration official wants to know what kind of work Mama will do, her demeanor changes to show more confidence. Your demeanor is your appearance or behavior.

- Which is an example of your demeanor, how you act toward your friend or how you search for a Web site?
- Is the food you eat for dinner part of your demeanor?

### Words About the Story

#### disillusioned

For a moment, Esperanza realizes that the trip may not go as well as she thought it would if the official sends her to jail or back to her uncles. In other words, she is disillusioned. If you are disillusioned, you realize that something or someone is not as good as you thought.

- What might make you disillusioned, winning a game or losing a game you were sure you would win?
- If you thought you were going to a fun party, but it turned out to be a boring party, would you be disillusioned?