Anchor Text Guidance: Grade 5, Module 1

Stories of Human Rights

Texts and authors

Esperanza Rising by Pam Muñoz Ryan
Lexile®: 750

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, written by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Lexile®: N/A

A Life Like Mine: How Children Live Around the World by DK Publishing
Lexile®: N/A

Text Overview

EL Education's Grade 5, Module 1 is designed to prompt consideration of these compelling questions:

- What are human rights, and how can they be threatened?
- How can we use writing to raise awareness of human rights?

Esperanza Rising offers an inside view of the exploitative farm labor systems that existed in the United States in the early 1930s. The book tells the story of a privileged young girl, Esperanza, who is forced to leave the family ranch in Mexico after the death of her father. Esperanza and her mother move to a camp for Mexican farm workers in California, where they are unprepared for the financial difficulties, hard labor, and discrimination they face. The novel traces Esperanza's journey as she struggles to start over in the face of significant adversity. A complex text that tells a coming-of-age story set in Mexico and rural California during the Great Depression, *Esperanza Rising* is based on the real-life experiences of the author's grandmother, who emigrated from Mexico to the United States in the same time period. *Esperanza Rising* is a testament to the endurance it takes to rise above difficult circumstances and find hope. By reading *Esperanza Rising*, students build historical context of human rights inequities through the experiences and perspectives of others.

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Students read excerpts of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as a lens through which to understand threats to human rights. They develop a critical understanding by analyzing situations using this lens and work to become ethical people by showing respect, empathy, and compassion for others as they grapple with sensitive topics. Finally, students work to contribute to a better world by applying their knowledge to raise awareness of threats to human rights.

Text Rationale

EL Education is committed to promoting students' character development to become ethical people and effective learners who contribute to a better world. Using *Esperanza Rising* and the UDHR, students explore human rights issues prevalent in Mexico and California in the first half of the 20th century.

Esperanza Rising builds understanding and empathy as students explore the guiding question, "What are human rights, and how can they be threatened?" The complex characters offer students the opportunity to examine how characters respond to challenges (RL.5.2) and to compare and contrast the main characters in the novel to each other (RL.5.3). The chapters have meaningful titles and connections (RL.5.5), and several repeating metaphors help students explore how authors use figurative language to create layers of meaning (L.5.5, RL.5.4). To culminate their work in the module, students apply their learning and awareness of human rights issues by writing and performing a monologue to illustrate an existing human rights issue.

Additional Considerations

Students may require support in understanding the settings in *Esperanza Rising*, as well as cultural elements specific to the story's time and place in history. The larger social issues raised by the book are still current and complex and should be handled sensitively. Throughout the book, students are asked to consider multiple perspectives. Work on respectful discourse to ensure that these discussions are comfortable and productive learning experiences. Finally, additional nonfiction texts are included in the module to build background knowledge and understanding.

EL Education recommends that school leaders and teachers read the texts in advance, with their specific school community in mind, to become familiar with the issues presented so that they can discuss them with students and families as needed.

Examples of sensitive topics that teachers should be prepared to address are detailed on the following pages.

1. Immigration

Esperanza Rising begins in Mexico, where the main characters are surrounded by wealth, servants, and grandeur. As the novel progresses, they become migrant farm workers in California with few resources, fewer choices, and threatened human rights. Be aware that the topic of immigration might be sensitive for some students who have had a personal connection or experience with immigration. Speak with students and families in advance, especially those who may have experienced governmental policies like the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or immigration policies from other countries, and consider how these policies may have an impact on students' lives. Be mindful that bias and violence against immigrants is unfortunately still part of US culture, so it is important to be sensitive to and respectful of students who may have experienced either or both.

Investigate the languages, routines, practices, rituals, beliefs, norms, and experiences that are important to students and their families. An ideal context for inclusiveness emerges as students share their feelings and experiences with regard to *Esperanza Rising* and the UDHR. Create a safe space for student discussion, in both English and their home languages, recognizing that these discussions may help create inequity, unearth trauma, or both. Celebrate the courage, enthusiasm, diversity, and assets that immigrants bring to the classroom.

Finally, *Esperanza Rising* contains author's notes in the appendix that detail her inspiration for the story: the life of her grandmother. If you think these notes would support students in avoiding the single story, consider reading and discussing them.

2. Racism, Classism, and Gender Bias

In designing this module, EL Education made intentional decisions to feature human rights violations experienced by farm laborers, classism between wealthy Mexican landowners and laborers (or "peasants"), classism in California's migrant farm labor camps, and gender bias against single females. An example of the depiction of classism is on page 77 of *Esperanza Rising*, when Mama explains to Esperanza how they are no longer wealthy:

> "In Aguascalientes, she would have thought it 'inappropriate' to tell an egg woman their problems, yet now she [Mama] didn't hesitate. 'Mama,' whispered Esperanza, taking on a tone she heard Mama say many times. 'Do you think it's wise to tell a peasant our personal business?' Mama tried not to smile. She whispered back, 'It is all right Esperanza, because now we are peasants, too.'"

In later chapters, farm laborers are segregated by race and class to specific farm camps. These groups include "Okies" from Oklahoma, Mexicans, Asian Americans, and those from the Midwest who flocked to the agriculture center of California in search of work and a better life during the Great Depression. In an example of racial stereotypes in the book, on page 79, Miguel speaks to Esperanza: "'Have you noticed?' he said, sounding surprised. 'Those with Spanish blood, who have the fairest complexion in the land, are the wealthiest.'"

The above is a reference to the racist belief that lighter-skinned peoples are more worthy. Within the farm camps, this is further explored as racism, classism, and gender bias combined. Esperanza, a girl born to wealth, becomes a servant, and the family receives only minimal lodging because her mother is widowed, therefore single. Throughout the novel, female gender roles common in the 1930s are shown, including females as caregivers, servants, cooks, and under the authority of males.

Engage students in open dialogue whenever possible to combat stereotypes, assumptions, or misrepresentations. Encourage productive and equitable conversation with Conversation Cues, which are questions teachers can ask students to help achieve four goals: (Goal 1) encourage all students to talk and be understood, (Goal 2) listen carefully to one another and seek to understand, (Goal 3) deepen thinking, and (Goal 4) think with others to expand the conversation. This will also serve to focus students on working to become ethical people by showing respect, empathy, and compassion if classmates are upset by perspectives in the text.

3. Exploitative Working Conditions and Illness

In addition to depicting racism and classism, *Esperanza Rising* portrays working conditions that often led to illness for migrant workers and their families. California's farm owners actively recruited Mexicans and Mexican Americans, believing that "desperate" people fleeing war would work under living conditions that other workers would not tolerate. These included hard labor, subpar housing, inequitable resource allocations, and exposure to illness. One such illness was Valley Fever, caused by inhaling airborne spores of the fungus *Coccidioides spp*. The spores are carried by the wind in dust particles when desert soil is disturbed. Untreated Valley Fever can lead to chronic fatigue, severe weight loss, pneumonia, meningitis, or even death. There's a roughly one percent chance that the fungal infection could spread to the rest of your body, causing disseminated Valley Fever, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention[1].

These working conditions also resulted in strikes and deportation. In the chapter "Los Esparragos," strikers organize to advocate for better working conditions: "When they arrived at the sheds, a crowd of women erupted into shouting and booing. They carried signs that said, 'Huelga! Strike!' Among them were Marta and her friends. They were yelling, 'Help us feed our children! We must all join together if we are to eat!'" (200)

The threat of authorities deporting laborers surfaces in the novel as well. On page 205, the text states: "In the distance, a caravan of gray buses and police cars headed fast toward the shed, dust flying in their wakes. 'Immigration!' said Josefina. 'It is a sweep.'"

Repatriation (forced removal and deportation) was a policy resulting from the economic devastation of the Great Depression. Mexicans, Mexican Americans, and Filipino farm laborers were targets in repatriation raids by immigration officers, as trade unions claimed that these groups were taking jobs from US citizens. Be sensitive to students' and families' feelings and experiences with immigration, specifically those who have experienced governmental policies such as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). For more information about the Mexican Repatriation program, access the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website at https://eled.org/2923.

Throughout the module, there are teaching notes for how to sensitively handle issues related to the way the characters in *Esperanza Rising* have their human rights threatened by poor working conditions. Be sensitive to students' and families' feelings and experiences about immigrant workers and illness, especially due to poor working conditions and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Acknowledge that students' feelings and experiences may differ greatly, from very positive to somewhat neutral to very negative. The main point students should understand by the end of the module is that people who have faced great adversity have important stories and lessons to share and that we should value and give voice to those stories.

[1] "Symptoms of Valley Fever." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases (NCEZID), Division of Foodborne, Waterborne, and Environmental Diseases (DFWED), www.cdc.gov/fungal/diseases/coccidioidomycosis/symptoms.html. Web. Accessed Feb. 12 2021.

4. Abandonment, Death, Displacement, Thievery, and Violence

Esperanza Rising contains references to death, displacement, abandonment, thievery, and violence. For example, on pages 233–234, the money Esperanza has been saving is stolen: "She grinned at Mama knowing how proud she would be of all the money orders. She opened the bag and her mouth dropped open. She couldn't believe what she saw. She tipped the valise upside down and shook it hard. It was empty, the money orders were gone. Miguel was the only one who could've taken the money orders."

These issues must be carefully and sensitively discussed to give students context as they read the story. Speak with students and families in advance, especially those who might have a connection to family displacement (due to circumstances such as separation, immigration, or revolution) or death. Be aware of the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as how current US immigration policies may shape the lives of students. Continue to be mindful that bias and violence against immigrants is unfortunately still part of US culture, so it is important to be sensitive to and respectful of students who may have experienced either or both.

5. Religious and Cultural Beliefs

Esperanza references her and her family's religious beliefs throughout the text. For example, they practice prayer, attend Catholic Mass, and use rosaries: "the rosaries, masses, and funeral [for Esperanza's father] lasted three days" (page 26) and "The woman blessed her and made the sign of the cross" (page 79). Several times throughout the novel, Esperanza or her mother reference prayer as something they do that gives them hope.

There are also references to cultural celebrations and observances; for example, Esperanza is dreaming of her Quinceañera, the celebration of a girl's 15th birthday that marks the passage from girlhood to womanhood in Spanish and Mexican cultures.

Religion and cultural beliefs convey values and ideas that may conflict with (or reinforce) one's own values or orientation to the world. Be aware that these may be personal topics for students and they are not required to share them. EL Education recommends teachers and/or school leaders meet with the families of students for whom *Esperanza Rising* may be in direct conflict with religious beliefs to discuss the novel and the content of the module tasks.

Tasks

Throughout the module, there are tasks that intentionally or incidentally serve to mitigate possible concerns and support students' enthusiastic, informed, and safe reading.

Unit 1

Lesson 2: This lesson begins with a reading of *Esperanza Rising*, which infuses Spanish words and phrases into the English text. Throughout the module, invite students to translate the Spanish into English and other home languages, as this encourages language development and helps establish academic mindsets and equity.

Lesson 3: In this lesson, students identify the historical setting of *Esperanza Rising*. Both the place and the time period of the text are integral for comprehension. Students will engage in expert groups in this lesson using provided research articles. Support students' understanding of historical settings by providing authentic examples of other familiar texts that take place during a specific time period, if needed. This lesson also includes the context for Esperanza's father's death at the hands of bandits. Define the term bandit or provide a simpler synonym, e.g.,

a criminal who is often in a gang in an area with no police; a robber or a murderer. Clarify that during the time period of the book, many people who lived in rural areas of Mexico had their land taken away and were forced to work for wealthy landowners, who paid and treated them very badly. As a result, some of them rebelled.

This topic might be upsetting for students who have a connection to violence, crime, or death. For example, on page 22, the following sentence appears: "When the wagon stopped, Esperanza could see a body in the back." Speak with students and families in advance, especially those who may have sensitivity to these topics. If productive, use Goal 1 Conversation Cues to encourage students to share their thoughts and feelings about Papa's death, e.g., "Can you say more about that?"

Lesson 4: In this lesson, students are given their own student-friendly copy of the UDHR for reference throughout the module, and they add symbols to the articles to help them remember what each section is about. They then make connections between the "Las Uvas" chapter in *Esperanza Rising* and articles of the UDHR.

Note that the term *threatened* (rather than *violated*) appears on the anchor chart in this lesson, as *threatened* is applicable to more events and situations. However, where human rights have been violated, for example with the death of Papa in the previous lesson, it is important to recognize this.

Lesson 5: In this lesson, students read the chapter "Las Papayas" from *Esperanza Rising* and analyze how it fits into the overall structure of the text. They then make connections between this chapter and the UDHR, looking for evidence of threats to human rights, before digging into Article 23 of the UDHR through a guided close read. This is also the lesson in which the following religion-related sentence appears: "The rosaries, masses, and funeral lasted three days." (26)

This lesson was designed as a teacher-led read-aloud; however, you may use your discretion to fit the needs of your students by using pair reading or silent reading followed by a journal response.

In this lesson, the habit of character focus is on working to become an ethical person. The characteristic that students practice is respect, as volunteers share personal reflections on what happened in the reading.

Lesson 8: In this lesson, students read the chapter "Las Guayabas" from *Esperanza Rising*. On page 80, Miguel speaks to Esperanza: "'Have you noticed?' He said, sounding surprised. 'Those with Spanish blood, who have the fairest complexion in the land, are the wealthiest.'" This is a reference to the racist belief that lighter-skinned people are more worthy.

One suggestion to combat this stereotype is to engage students in a Mini Language Dive. Ask students about the meaning of chunks from this key sentence: **Those with Spanish blood, who have the fairest complexions in the land, are the wealthiest.** Consult the Opening B section of Lesson 8 for further guidance. Refer to the Module 1 Teacher Guide Appendix or the "Language Dives in the Curriculum" document on the Tools page (https://curriculum.eleducation.org/tools/k-8) for additional information on Language Dives.

Lesson 10: In this lesson and the next, students prepare for and participate in a short text-based discussion in which they describe threats to human rights in chapters 1–6 of *Esperanza Rising*, using both this text and the UDHR, and discuss how those threats make them feel. The lesson intends that the chapter "Las Cebollas" be a teacher read-aloud, but this can be organized in different ways to meet the needs of students. For example, students could read the chapter in pairs or triads, taking turns to read, with a teacher-led smaller group of students who need additional support.

Continue to use Goal 1 Conversation Cues to promote productive and equitable conversation. Emphasize the habit of character "working to become ethical people," and share with students the need to practice respectful collaborative discussions and demonstrate empathy and compassion as they discuss how the threats to human rights make them feel.

Unit 2

In this unit, students continue to read *Esperanza Rising* to make connections to the UDHR. As students compare and contrast characters' reactions to situations and events in which their human rights have been threatened, continue to monitor student reactions to the sensitive topics presented in the text.

Lesson 1: In this lesson, students engage with the text *A Life Like Mine: How Children Live Around the World*, which they were introduced to in Unit 1. *A Life Like Mine* is based on the tenets of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a set of rights similar to the UDHR, written especially for children. The text reflects on and highlights the everyday lives of children across the globe. In this lesson, students compare *A Life Like Mine* to *Esperanza Rising* to deepen their learning about human rights.

Continue to provide a safe space with time to reflect on the sensitive events in *Esperanza Rising*. Also provide opportunities to discuss how those events fit into the overall structure of the story and to make connections between the events and the UDHR.

Lessons 3 and 4: In these lessons, students continue to make connections between *Esperanza Rising* and the UDHR, looking for evidence of threats to human rights, before analyzing character reactions to the situation of Esperanza's mother being ill and going to the hospital, and Esperanza having to work to pay the medical bills. Be particularly sensitive to students who may have experience with illness and/or death, especially during COVID-19.

Unit 3

In this unit, students prepare to present their research, writing, and module-culminating monologues. Students work in groups to plan and write their monologues from the perspective of different characters in *Esperanza Rising*. Strongly consider pairing ELLs with students who have greater language proficiency, and have these pairs plan monologues from the perspective of the same character.

During all interactions (discussion protocols, partner work, etc.), be aware that partnering with, looking at, talking with, or touching other genders may be uncomfortable or inappropriate for students from some cultures. In addition, some students may believe it is inappropriate to speak with other students at all during class, especially if they are from another country or culture. Let students know that speaking with a peer of any gender when the teacher gives the signal is appropriate, and it is one way that students can become independent learners and develop their knowledge and language ability. At the same time, tell students that you respect their needs, and if necessary, seek alternative arrangements for students according to their cultural traditions.

Including Families

Families of students working through this module are invited to discuss any concerns they have about the texts with the children and their teacher. Teaching notes throughout the module recommend that teachers speak to families of students who may be particularly affected by the topics encountered. Notes in the homework materials distributed to families recommend that they reach out to teachers with questions or concerns about the texts. These materials also encourage families to talk with their children about the texts they are reading, particularly if any of the topics raised might be sensitive to a particular student.