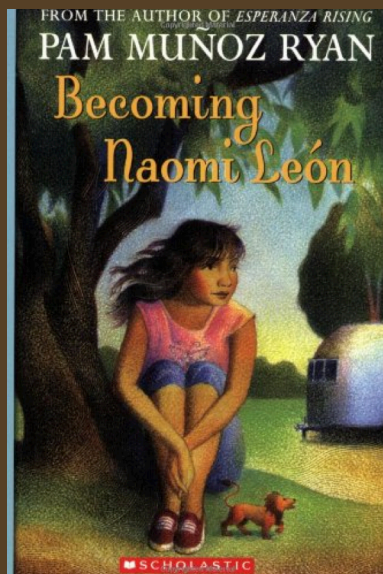


Becoming Naomi Leon Reading Guide



Questions and Ideas for Consideration

Family: In what ways does the story redefine or complicate notions of family, and especially what it means to be a good mother?

Disability: Consider the portrayal of Owen. Does the novel offer a productive or positive representation of disability, and what role does this play in the story?

Culture: How does the text offer a complex, nuanced, or interesting representation of Mexico and Latino/Latina culture?

Heritage: In what ways does the text offer a unique portrayal of someone with a dual heritage in the way Naomi considers her Oklahoma and Mexican roots?

Words: Naomi is very interested in words and language, and the text also weaves thoughtful and interesting language use throughout. What effect do these elements have on the story and how do they contribute to its message or theme?

Name/Identity: How does the story use the idea of names to explore issues of identity? What messages does this story offer about questioning the self?

Space and Place: In what ways does the story ask readers to consider the concept of space or place, and how does this relate to culture and identity?

Daybook Possibilities

- Naomi loves making lists. Mimic her behavior by making several lists related to your own life, and then consider why Naomi enjoys this and what role it plays in the story. What does this element add to the novel?
- Learn a little more about the settings and geography of the story, including Naomi's home in California, Oaxaca in Mexico, or even the ways culture in these areas is unique from Naomi's Oklahoma heritage. Consider even mapping Naomi's journey.
- Create a chart of important friendships in the story, and describe how each of these contributes to ideologies about family and relationships.
- Check out picture books that integrate Spanish language and/or Hispanic culture, such as *ABeCedarios: Mexican Folk Art ABCs in Spanish and English* by Cynthia Weill and describe what you observe.
- Research laws and news related to custody arrangements and write about your opinions, including the way the story represents these elements and Gran's decision to leave.
- Visit <http://www.pammunozryan.com/> or watch a video interview with Munoz Ryan at www.readingrockets.org/books/interviews/ryan. Explore other author links and respond.
- Create a timeline or other visual representation of Naomi's character development, analyzing how she changes and grows throughout the story.

Resources and Critical Reading

"Beyond Tamales, Tacos, and Our Southern Neighbors" by Susie Jans-Thomas

JS Curwood's "Redefining Normal: A Critical Analysis of (Dis)Ability in YA Literature"

"Stories to our Children: A Program Aimed at Developing Authentic and Culturally Relevant Literature for Latina/o Children" by Luis Rosado

"On Writing the American Familia" by Meg Medina

Background and Context

Author of prized and acclaimed children's novels and illustrated texts, Pam Muñoz Ryan has written such works as *Esperanza Rising*, *Becoming Naomi Leon*, and her newest Newbery Honor Book, *Echo*. The 2005 *Becoming Naomi Leon* explores questions of culture and identity as Naomi faces questions about her own strength, and whether she can live up to her surname León—the lion. When her previously absent mother returns to claim her, Naomi runs away to Oaxaca, Mexico with her younger brother and great-grandmother, seeking her father and a way to find the courage to keep her family together.