

What Happened When

Esperanza's story spans about a year, beginning just before her thirteenth birthday in Aguascalientes and ending as she celebrates her fourteenth birthday in California. The novel's title hints at how the story will end—Esperanza rises.

Before she can rise, however, Esperanza must face and overcome problems and obstacles. These obstacles are the story's conflicts. They drive the rising action to the story's climax and are resolved during the falling action and resolution.

When the story begins, readers meet Esperanza and her family at a happy time—the beginning of the grape harvest and the month of her birthday. This part of a story is called its exposition. It usually finds the protagonist, or main character, content and safe in her familiar world.

The story's main conflict begins with the death of Sixto Ortega, Esperanza's father. The plot point that starts the conflict is sometimes called the inciting incident. To incite something is to make it happen. When Mama and Esperanza see Papa's special belt buckle, they know their safe world has been shattered. Papa's death is the event that starts the story's climb toward the climax.

Conflicts cause fallout. That is, they make other problems happen. Mama (Ramona Ortega) faces fallout when Luis and Tio try to force her to marry Luis and to send Esperanza to a boarding school. The threat to her family is grave. Without her husband's protection, Ramona has very little power to protect Esperanza and their home, so with the help of friends, she and Esperanza flee, leaving Papa's burned rose garden behind.

For Esperanza, facing life without her adoring Papa brings conflicts appropriate to a child of her age and experience. Of course, she feels shock and grief, but she also suffers the complete loss of her secure, happy world and predictable future. Esperanza will no longer be pampered and served by household staff. She is now, as Mama reminds her, poor and dependent on others' help. She carries only the doll Papa bought for her birthday into her new life. Esperanza's struggle to adapt to her new life drives much of the novel's story.

She must leave her beloved Abuelita behind at the convent. As Abuelita says goodbye to Esperanza, she asks for two promises: Esperanza will finish the blanket and look after Mama. Keeping these promises also moves Esperanza through her story to its climax.

For a time, it seems that Esperanza faces one problem after another, all arising from the central conflict: Papa is gone, and Mama and Esperanza must make a new life without his guidance, love, and protection. Think about the problems Esperanza copes with as the story moves toward its climax. She must learn to do chores—and do without school.

She must care for Mama when Mama becomes ill after the dust storm and work an adult's job to pay for

Mama's care.

She must grapple with the strikers' demands and their threatening actions during the asparagus harvest.

She must learn to be a friend to Isabel and to redefine her relationship with Miguel now that they are both on the same side of the "river" that had separated them in Mexico.

As she faces and finds ways to deal with each of these problems, Esperanza changes. A story's conflicts don't just drive the plot structure through its climax and resolution. The conflicts also drive character development. Esperanza experiences seasons of growth during her first year in California, from one harvest of grapes to the next.

Now you will read the final chapter of *Esperanza Rising*. How will the climax—the high point of tension and interest in the plot—be reached? What will happen to resolve the conflict? It's time to find out.
