



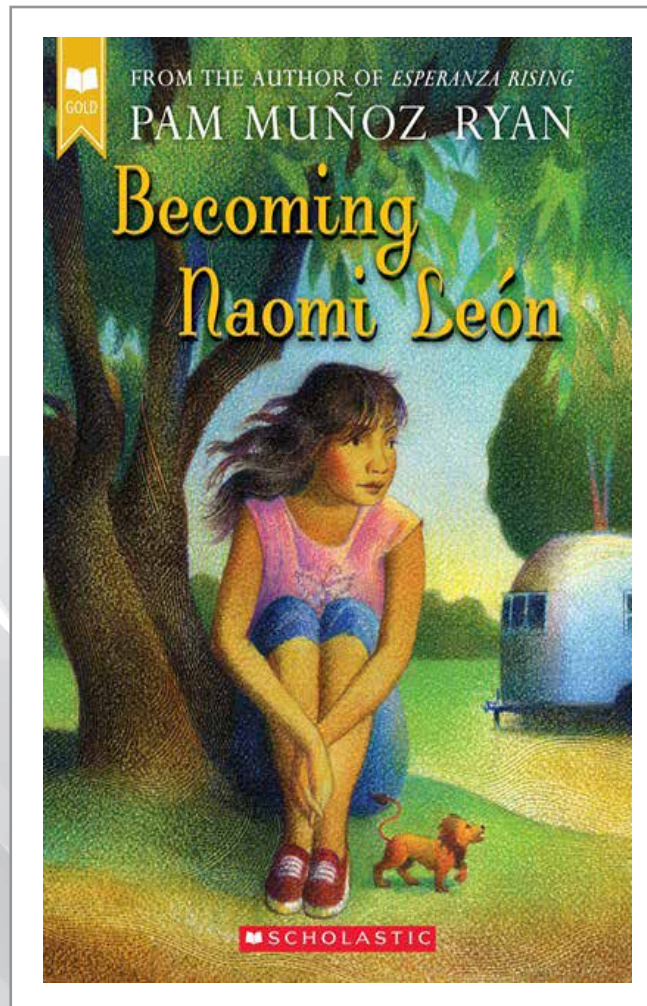
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Becoming Naomi León

Pam Muñoz Ryan



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Becoming Naomi Leon

Pam Munoz Ryan

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Creative thinking, identifying attributes, supporting judgments, inference, prediction

Literary Elements

Story mapping, characterization, setting, conflict, theme, symbolism, author's purpose

Vocabulary

Classifying, root words, definitions, homophones, target words

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, debate, interviewing, oral presentation

Writing

Creative writing, narrative, letters, dialogue, speech, journalism, poetry

Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research, compare/contrast, fact/opinion, cause/effect, analysis, evaluation

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—Mexican culture, family relationships, bullies, time line, recipes; Science—hummingbirds, potato maze, weather, Mexican redneck tarantula, sea turtles, earthquake preparedness; Health—psychology, positive thinking, nutrition; Art—illustration, design, Mexican folk art; Geography—maps; Music; Math

Genre: fiction

Setting: trailer park in present-day Lemon Tree, California; Oaxaca City, Mexico

Point of View: first person

Themes: non-traditional families, family relationships, physical disabilities, bicultural heritage, fitting in, abandonment, courage, triumph over adversity, discovering one's self

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. society

Style: narrative

Tone: conversational, candid

Date of First Publication: 2004

Summary

Becoming Naomi León is a story about fifth grader Naomi Soledad León Outlaw's journey to discover the person she is meant to be. Naomi and her younger brother, Owen, live in a California trailer park with their great-grandmother, whom they call "Gram." With the help of Gram's love and positive thinking, Naomi and Owen overcome problems from their past—namely, the trauma of being abandoned by their mother seven years earlier. To Naomi and Owen's dismay, their mother returns, bringing with her a history of alcohol abuse and Clive, her self-centered boyfriend. Naomi and Owen are hopeful about the possibility of a relationship with their newfound mother until they learn of her true intentions to take Naomi to Las Vegas and leave Owen behind. To protect the children, Gram takes them to Oaxaca, Mexico, to search for their father. Naomi discovers the Mexican half of her heritage, her identity, and the courage to help keep her family together.

About the Author

Pam Muñoz Ryan grew up in California's San Joaquin Valley with her two sisters and extended family, including 23 cousins. Like her character Naomi, Ryan has quirky habits and a mixed cultural background. She considers herself "truly American" due to her mixed heritage, composed of Spanish, Mexican, Basque, Italian, and Oklahoman ancestry. "Many American children share a heritage from another country with no knowledge of that country," Ryan says. Unlike Naomi, Ryan speaks Spanish and knows about her heritage.

After college, Ryan worked as a bilingual Head Start teacher and administrator. It wasn't until after she went back to San Diego State University to get a master's degree in education that a colleague encouraged her to write professionally.

Ryan's books for young people include award-winning titles such as *Esperanza Rising*, *Riding Freedom*, *Amelia and Eleanor Go for a Ride*, and *When Marian Sang*. *Becoming Naomi León* has also won awards, including the 2006 Pura Belpré Honor Book and the 2004 Américas Award Commended Title. Some of Ryan's books have been translated into Spanish, and she also writes for a Japanese publisher. "Changing formats and genres, between picture books and novels, fiction and nonfiction, keeps me enthusiastic and challenged," Ryan says. Today, she lives in north San Diego County with her husband, four children, and two dogs.

a rabble of yesterdays—Chapter 2

Naomi Soledad León Outlaw and her brother, Owen, live with Gram at Avocado Acres Trailer Rancho. Gram uses practical solutions, her “Oklahoma notions,” and positive thinking to help her great-grandchildren overcome problems from their past—traumas the children are too young to fully remember or understand. Though Owen has physical disabilities, he is a bright student who believes in luck. Naomi doesn’t talk much, but her soap carving and list making keep her mind and hands busy. To Naomi, her biggest problem in life is her name. But that all changes when Naomi and Owen’s mother returns after seven long years, saying it’s time she gets to know her children.

Vocabulary

unravel
bedraggled
avocado
polyester
mulled
iota
self-prophecy
alterations
abominations
flourish
sanctuary
unruly
predisposition
coincidence
sloughed
etching
apparition
whorl
insecurities
trauma

Discussion Questions

1. What are most people’s first opinions of Owen? Are they usually accurate? (*Most people assume that Owen isn’t smart because of his physical handicaps. On the contrary, though, Owen gets the best grades in his class.*)
2. Naomi thinks “the biggest problem” in her life is her name but that someday she will “live up to it” (p. 1). What does Gram tell her? Predict how you think Naomi will live up to her name. (*Gram says she is proud of their last name [“Outlaw”] and that there are worse things in life. She suggests that Naomi try not to embarrass the boys who tease her but instead concentrate on thinking positively. She suggests that Naomi start a new list titled “Those boys will not bother me” [p. 6]. Answers will vary.*)
3. Gram believes a person can make things happen by thinking “positive.” Do you agree with Gram? What does Naomi say about thinking “positive”? (*Answers will vary. Naomi says positive thinking is “like magic,” but it doesn’t always work as she hopes.*)
4. Review the five items on Naomi’s “Regular and Everyday Worries” list. Do you think any of the items are worth worrying about? (*Answers will vary.*)
5. Why does Gram call Naomi “brown shaggy dog”? Why does Owen call her “the center of a peanut butter sandwich between two pieces of white bread” (p. 11)? (*Gram says this because*

Naomi’s hair is a “wild mop.” Owen says this because Naomi takes after the Mexican side of the family and has brown eyes, hair, and skin. He and Gram, meanwhile, take after the Oklahoman side of the family and have fair skin and light-colored hair.)

6. What do most folks say about Gram? Do you agree with them? How does Gram feel? (*Gram is Naomi and Owen’s great-grandmother, so most people think she is too old to raise children. Answers will vary. Gram feels lucky to have Naomi and Owen and considers them prizes.*)
7. Why does Naomi carve soap and make lists? How do these activities help her? (*When Naomi first came to live with Gram, her hands shook and she didn’t talk. Gram wanted to keep Naomi’s mind and hands busy, so she introduced Naomi to the world of soap carving. Answers will vary but should include that soap carving and list making help Naomi sort through her worries and thoughts.*)

8. Why do you think Naomi is “never content” to carve just one of anything? (*Answers will vary. Suggestions: Two and three carvings may represent Naomi, Owen, and Gram. Wanting companionship for her carvings may represent Naomi’s remembrance and/or fears of abandonment.*)
9. Why does Owen put tape on his shirt? Do you think Gram should make him remove the tape? (*for comfort and because it brings him a “peculiar satisfaction” [p. 20]; Answers will vary.*)
10. How do Gram, Naomi, and Owen feel about Skyla’s sudden visit? (*Gram: looks as if she’s seen a ghost, fears losing the children, protects Naomi and Owen and lets Skyla know she can’t disrupt their lives, and angrily reminds Skyla of the children’s past and how cruelly Skyla treated them. Naomi: vaguely remembers her mother’s voice, eyes, and perfume, and feels queasy and worried yet can’t wait to see Skyla again. Owen: “starry-eyed” and excited, and hopes Skyla missed them and wants to be involved in their lives.*)
11. How do Gram and Skyla recall the past differently? (*Gram says Skyla left Owen covered with infected insect bites and that Naomi refused to talk because of insecurities and other traumas. She says Skyla agreed when she abandoned the children not to interfere with Gram’s raising them. Skyla makes light of the past and says Naomi was always stubborn and quiet, and Owen only had a few fleabites. She touts her parental rights and claims that it’s time for her to get to know her children.*)
12. **Prediction:** How will Skyla’s reappearance change life for Naomi, Owen, and Gram?

Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Analysis: Begin Character Attribute Webs (see p. 26 of this guide) for Naomi, Owen, Gram, and Skyla. Add to each chart as you read.
2. Literary Analysis: Begin the Story Map on page 27 of this guide. Add to it as you read.
3. Social Studies: Many families use a family tree to document their ancestors. However, Naomi and Owen belong to a non-traditional family, as they don’t live with either of their parents. Design a family tree that would be useful for non-traditional families.
4. Art: Read “Soap Carving” at the back of the novel. Follow the instructions to create your own soap carving.

Sociogram

Directions: Write the name of a different character in each circle. On the “spokes” surrounding each character’s name, write several adjectives that describe that character. How does one character influence another? On the arrows joining one character to another, write a description of the relationship between the two characters. Remember, relationships go both ways, so each line requires a descriptive word.

