

Teaching the Book

Can Naomi Soledad León Outlaw ever live up to her Mexican surname León—the lion? This award-winning novel about a young girl caught in the middle of family conflicts provides an opportunity to teach how a character changes and grows as she learns lessons about life and herself. Students will engage in activities including mapping a trip to Oaxaca, Mexico, learning Spanish and English cognates, and exploring the meaning of their own names.

Theme Focus: Identity

Comprehension Focus: Analyze Character

Language Focus: Spanish and English Words

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pam Muñoz Ryan was born and raised in Bakersfield, California, in the San Joaquin Valley. Her Mexican grandmother lived around the corner, and her Oklahoman grandmother lived in the nearby town of Lamont. “When I was with one, I often ate enchiladas, rice, and beans. When I was with the other, I ate black-eyed peas, fried okra, and peach cobbles.” During her childhood, she spent many days riding her bike to a small branch library to fill her bike basket with books. After college, Pam became a bilingual teacher and then left her job in education to raise her own children. Eventually, she went

BOOK STATS

Grade Level Equivalent: 5–7

Ages: 10+

Lexile Measure: 830L

Pages: 264

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Subject/Theme: Identity, Family

Common Core Standards	Reading	Writing	Listening & Speaking	Language
Grade 5	RL.5.1, RL.5.2, RL.5.4	W.5.1	SL.5.1, SL.5.5	L.5.4
Grade 6	RL.6.1, RL.6.2, RL.6.4	W.6.1	SL.6.1, SL.6.5	L.6.4
Grade 7	RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.4,	W.7.1	SL.7.1, SL.7.5	L.7.4

OVERVIEW

Book Summary

Naomi Soledad León Outlaw has a lot of problems to deal with in her young life—including the “funniest last name in the universe.” She and her brother Owen have lived with their great-grandmother, Gram, at Avocado Acres Trailer Rancho in California for the last seven years. Naomi worries a lot and has difficulty speaking up. When the mother who abandoned her suddenly shows up at Gram’s trailer, Naomi is caught up in a whirlwind of challenges and changes.

Gram, Naomi, and Owen set off on a journey to Mexico to discover the children’s long-lost father, Santiago León. Finding her father and participating in a radish-carving festival help Naomi understand her León heritage and develop her own strength and determination.

By the end of the book, Naomi faces a test that could result in the end of her happy existence with Gram and Owen. She finds the courage to become who she is meant to be—Naomi León, or Naomi the lioness.

back to school for her master’s degree. That’s when a professor encouraged her to write. More than twenty-five books later, Pam Muñoz Ryan is the award-winning author of the novels *Esperanza Rising*, *Riding Freedom*, *Paint the Wind*, and *The Dreamer*, as well as numerous picture books. She lives with her husband in north San Diego County near the Pacific Ocean, where she writes full time. Her four grown children frequently come and go. Two dogs, Buddy and Sammie, keep her company while she works. Visit Pam Muñoz Ryan’s website at <http://www.pammunozryan.com/>.

Get Ready to Read

Pre-Reading Activities

What's in a Name? Introduce students to the book's main character Naomi Soledad León Outlaw. Write the name on the whiteboard or on chart paper. Ask students if they know the meaning or background of the individual parts of her name. (Naomi comes from Hebrew and means pleasant or beautiful; Soledad means solitude or aloneness in Spanish; León is a Spanish name meaning lion; Outlaw is an English word that means outside the law.) Ask students what parts of her name Naomi probably likes or doesn't like.

Ask students what they know about their own last names—either the meaning or the country the name is from. Suggest that they learn more by asking their parents about their first and last names. Have them ask how their first name was chosen. Prompt them to think about names they wish they had or names that would describe what they are really like.

Preview and Predict Have students spend time looking at the illustration on the cover of the book. Prompt them with these questions: Where might Naomi live? Why might there be a small lion in the picture? What kind of person do you think Naomi is? Discuss students' answers to the questions and encourage other predictions they might have about the book.



BIG QUESTION

Critical Thinking Ask students to think about this question as they read and be ready to answer it when they have finished the book. Write the question on chart paper or have students write it in their reading journals.

What do you think the title of the book means?

STORIA ENRICHMENTS

This Storia e-book has the following enrichments to enhance students' comprehension of the book.

- Word Scramble (2)
- About You
- Word Twister (2)
- Who Said It?
- Do You Know?

Vocabulary

Spanish and English Words Tell students that Naomi makes many lists in her notebook, including “splendid” and “superb” new words that she learns. The list below contains half English and half Spanish words that Naomi records. Ask students to look for clues in the text to figure out the word meanings or to check dictionary definitions. Encourage students to keep a list of new words they learn from the book and give their list a title such as Splendid or Superb.

Use **Resource #1: Vocabulary Cards** on page 7 and distribute copies to students. Ask them to write down the definitions for the words as they read them in the book.

flourish (p. 10)	sanctuary (p. 10)
tropical (p. 142)	ecstatic (p. 241)
quesillo (p. 156)	mercado (p. 154)
maravilloso (p. 190)	fantástico (p. 217)

As You Read

Reading the Book

Modeled Reading Read aloud the first chapter of the book, asking students to follow along. Then ask them these questions: What do you know so far about Naomi? What do you know about Owen and Gram? Why do the titles of the chapters have the names they do? Clarify any questions students have before they begin reading the book.

Independent Reading Assign students to read *Becoming Naomi León* independently. Remind them to keep the Big Question in mind as they read.

Comprehension Focus

Analyze Character *Becoming Naomi León* presents an excellent opportunity to teach students to analyze how a character changes as a result of events in her life. Remind students that a reader can get to know a character by watching how the character speaks, thinks, and acts. These pieces of evidence are clues to the character's traits or personality.

Use the graphic organizer on **Resource #2: Analyze Character** to model for students how to use evidence to analyze character traits. Project the page on a whiteboard or pass out copies to students.

Model: We're going to think about Naomi and her character traits and how she changed during the story. A trait is a quality or habit that a person has. The first trait listed for Naomi at the beginning of the book is "a worrier." Is that true about Naomi? I'll see if I can find evidence of that in the text. Okay, I see on page 9 that she says she is good at worrying. In fact, she keeps a list of "Regular and Everyday Worries." I'll write that in the second column as evidence of "a worrier."

Have students fill in the rest of the organizer for the traits listed for Naomi and the beginning and end of the book. Ask them to supply two of the traits themselves. (*Answers will vary because there are many examples in both the text and illustrations.*)

After You Read

Questions to Discuss

Lead students in a discussion of these focus story elements.

1. Identity By the end of the book, Naomi feels like Naomi the Lion. Many things happen to make her feel that way. What do you think the most important one is? (*Sample answers: She found out that her father really loved her. She stood up to her mother in the courtroom.*)

2. Analyze Character Even though he has physical challenges, Naomi's brother Owen has a very positive outlook on life. Why do you think he has this personality? How do you know that he still feels

emotional pain about his life? (*Sample answers: He may have inherited his positive outlook from Gram; he may need a positive outlook just to carry on; he wears tape over his chest which shows that he still has a lot of fears.*)

3. Spanish and English Words What words on Naomi's list are synonyms of *splendid* and *superb*? What other words do you know that have similar meanings? (*Answer: maravilloso and fantastico; super, fabulous, wonderful, magnificent, excellent.*)

Questions to Share

Encourage students to share their responses with a partner or small group.

- 1. Text to Self** Do you feel that you have a good name—a name that explains who you really are?
- 2. Text to World** Do you think the judge made the right decision about who would have custody of Naomi? Why or why not?
- 3. Text to Text** What other character have you read about in a book or seen in a movie who has problems with his or her family, as Naomi León does. Describe the character and compare and contrast him or her with Naomi.

WORDS TO KNOW

Spanish and English Words

Ask students to refer to the definitions they wrote on their vocabulary cards to answer the following questions. Ask students what English words sound similar to the Spanish words.

1. Where do you go to find **sanctuary** from the world?
2. What is your favorite dish with **quesillo**?
3. What place has a **tropical** climate?
4. What person or thing would you describe as **maravilloso**?
5. What experience made you feel **ecstatic**?

Ask students to share words from the lists they made as they read. Using their words, ask several more questions that require a specific understanding of a word's meaning.

Extension Activities

Reading/Writing Connection

Finding the Theme Ask students: What message or lesson about life did you get from reading *Becoming Naomi León*? Explain that an author doesn't state the theme of a novel outright. When each reader thinks deeply about a book they take away messages about life. Often, it is like a lesson, such as "determination is more important than talent." Give students this writing starter: I think the theme of *Becoming Naomi León* is _____. I think this because _____. Ask them to write at least three reasons that support their idea about the theme of the book.

Content Area Connections

Social Studies **Map the Journey** Naomi, Owen, and Gram travel in their trailer to Mexico to find Naomi's father. The town of Lemon Tree where they live is based on Lemon Grove, California. They travel to Oaxaca, Mexico. Challenge students to trace their journey using Google Maps. Show them how to find driving directions and input the beginning and end points of the journey. Ask them to print out the map of the journey and note how many miles it is and how many hours it takes.

Language Arts **Spanish and English Cognates** Use the book as an opportunity to expand students' understanding of the similarities between English and Spanish. Explain that there are many similarities between Spanish and English words. Print out the following minibook about food cognates for students to read and share: <http://bit.ly/T3UFF8>.

Science **Family Traits** Naomi takes after her Mexican father with brown hair and brown eyes, but her brother Owen resembles the Outlaw side of the family. Students interested in science may enjoy learning more about genetics by reading about it on the internet or by watching the following video: <http://bit.ly/U4zc1a>.

Arts **Oaxacan Carving** Provide activities for students who want to learn more about the art of Oaxacan woodcarv-

Don't forget the



BIG QUESTION

Critical Thinking Give each student an opportunity to answer the big question. Encourage students to support their answers with details and evidence from the text. Tell them there is no one right answer.

What do you think the title of the book means?

ing. An outstanding book for young students is *ABeCedarios: Mexican Folk Art ABCs in Spanish and English* by Cynthia Weill. *ABeCedarios* is an alphabet book which uses hand carved Oaxacan figurines of animals to illustrate the Spanish and English alphabet. Alternatively, guide students to research Oaxacan wood carving online and then draw one of the figures they find, including the brightly colored patterns painted on the wood. Students might also research the Oaxacan radish-carving festival called The Night of the Radishes.

BIG ACTIVITY

My Name Means . . . Ask students to find out the meaning of their name— including first, middle, and last names. Tell them that there are several ways to do this. First, they can research the meaning of their names online. Second, they can ask their family members why they were given their first and middle names and what the country of origin is of their last names [where their ancestors came from]. Third, they can explain why they have certain nicknames and why. Make copies of the printable **Big Activity: My Name Means . . .** on page 6 and distribute to students. Read the directions and answer any questions to clarify the activity.

Name: _____ Date: _____

BIG ACTIVITY: *My Name Means . . .*

Do you know what your name means and why it was chosen for you? Do some research and ask questions to find out. Then fill in the chart below.

Name	What It Means	Like? Dislike? Why?
First		
Middle		
Last		
Nickname		

What name do you wish you had? Why would you choose this name for yourself?

READ MORE AND LEARN MORE

Use these books and other resources to expand your students' study of the book or theme.

Author Connections



Esperanza Rising

Pam Muñoz Ryan

Ages: 10–13

Lexile Level: 750L

Guided Reading Level: V

When Esperanza and Mama are forced to flee from their wealthy life in Mexico during the 1930s, they end up in a farm labor camp in California. There, they must confront the challenges of hard work and the Great Depression. Eventually, Esperanza relinquishes her hold on the past and embraces a future full of family and community. This award-winning novel is coming-of-age fiction at its best.

Available as an Storia e-book

Grades: 5–7

Pages: 304



Paint the Wind

Pam Muñoz Ryan

Ages: 9–12

Lexile Level: 780L

Eleven-year-old Maya lives with her stern grandmother who has refused to share stories about her deceased parents. When her grandmother passes away suddenly, Maya is sent to live with her mother's family in Wyoming. Meanwhile, a wild mustang named Artemisia is roaming the hills—and when the mustang and Maya find their lives woven together, both of them are forever changed.

Available as a Storia e-book

Grades: 4–6

Pages: 352

Theme Connections



Downtown Boy

Juan Felipe Herrera

Ages: 12–14

Lexile Level: 740L

Juanito Palomares' family members are pickers

on a farm in rural California until they move to San Francisco. Juanito struggles to find his place among the neighborhood kids, and his father is suddenly never home. When his dad returns, the family moves once again—this time to San Diego. Juanito's unsettled life means he struggles with personal family hardships and the challenge of figuring out who he truly is. **Available as an Storia e-book**

Grades: 7–9

Pages: 304



How I Saved My Father's Life (And Ruined Everything Else)

Ann Hood

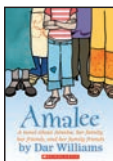
Ages: 10–13

Lexile Level: 770L

Twelve-year-old Madeline believes she can perform miracles. Her biggest one to date is saving her father from an avalanche. Unfortunately, he then divorces Madeline's mother, writes a book about the avalanche, becomes a celebrity, and remarries. Madeline is left with her mother, her hypochondriac little brother, and no clue how to perform the miracle that will fix it all. **Available as a Storia e-book**

Grades: 5–7

Pages: 224



Amalee

Dar Williams

Ages: 9–12

Lexile Level: 680L

Guided Reading Level: T

Amalee has always had a unique relationship with her dad's four best friends. Her mom has passed away, and when her dad gets sick, Amalee is faced with a whole new set of fears and worries. As Amalee turns to her dad's friends for guidance, she discovers that she's also able to help the adults with their own troubles. **Available as a Storia e-book**

Grades: 4–7

Pages: 208



Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time

Lisa Yee

Ages: 10–13

Lexile Level: 650L

Guided Reading Level: X

Stanford Wong is having a bad summer. If he flunks his summer-school English class, he won't pass sixth grade. Plus, things are not going well at home—his dad is a workaholic, his parents are fighting, and his grandmother has to move to an assisted-living facility. But with his sense of humor, Stanford just might be able to make it through the summer. **Available as a Storia e-book**

Grades: 5–7

Pages: 144

Go to <http://teacher.scholastic.com/ereading-resources/> to find PDF versions of the Storia teacher guides and links to purchase the related books.

flourish

sanctuary

slogan

ecstatic

agenda

mercado

maravilloso

fantastico

Resource #2: Analyze Character

Name: _____ Date: _____

How did Naomi change from the beginning to the end of the book? Fill in an example of each character trait in the chart below. Then add the missing traits.

Naomi Soledad León Outlaw

CHARACTER	TRAIT	EVIDENCE
Beginning of Book	1. a worrier	
	2. shy and quiet	
	3. unhappy at school	
End of Book	1. confident	
	2.	
	3.	