



Becoming Naomi Leon **By Pam Munoz Ryan***

Grade/Class/Subject: Grades 6-8 Language Arts

Content Standards: LA.7.2.1.7 The student will locate and analyze an author's use of allusions and descriptive idiomatic, and figurative language in a variety of literary text, identifying how word choice is used to appeal to the reader's senses and emotions, providing evidence from text to support the analysis.

Content Objective(s): Meets FL STATUTE 1003.42 – *Hispanic Contributions to the United States*

The student will read and analyze text by discussing guided reading questions.

Language Objective(s): The student will provide examples from the text to guide discussion and, in writing, formulate how word choice appeals to the reader's senses and emotions.

Grouping Configurations: Whole class; small groups; literature circles

Story Synopsis: Although Naomi and her little brother Owen have a great life living with their Gram, there are times when she really misses her mother. Naomi has some vague memories and Owen can't remember her at all. They live in a small trailer and enjoy life under Gram's loving care. The bliss of this simple life is thrown into turmoil when Skyla, their mother, shows up one day and announces that she wants to get to know her children.

It doesn't take anyone long to realize that Skyla has other motives. She introduces a boyfriend, Clive, who has his own daughter. She also shows herself to be moody and bossy. But perhaps the most telling behavior is her attitude toward Owen. Because Owen has been physically handicapped since birth, Skyla has no use for the bright little boy. She has come with no other reason than to find a baby-sitter for her boyfriend's child, and very soon Gram and the children are in danger of being separated.

As these things are going on, there is also the search for the father, which leads them to the city of Oaxaca where soap-carving competitions are held each year and where their natural father Santiago, a renowned artist himself, is said to live. This is where they eventually meet up and where Naomi's carving skills are richly rewarded.

Finally Naomi and Gram get their day in court, and Gram is awarded custody of the children. Looking back on all that had happened, Naomi concludes that on the outside of things, nothing much had changed. On the inside though, she was different and becoming who she was meant to be. She was someone who could now overcome an army of worries.

The author's particular style of writing provides an excellent opportunity to illustrate how the use of allusions and descriptive idiomatic, and figurative language appeal to the emotions and senses of the readers.

Key Vocabulary

Airstream trailer	polyester	“stick-up”
trailer park	sanctuary	singsong
Baby Beluga	jabber-mouth	mind food
ambience	dapper	eaves
tight-lipped	halfway house	cattywampus
bluster	nettles	oozing
squinty	caterwaul	consultation
orderly	muster	balance
Oaxaca	scrunched	mediator
dwindled	prospect	determination
prophecy	maverick	cobblestone street
whittled	huddle	spectacle

Supplementary Materials

- chart paper
- markers
- blank index cards

Lesson Sequence

Vocabulary:

Make an overhead transparency, or create a Promethean flipchart, or list the words on chart paper under the following headings:

- Naming Words-Nouns
- Action Words-Verbs
- Describing Words-adjectives/adverbs

Divide students into groups of four. Ask each student to choose three words, one from each category. Have them write each of their words down on one side of an index cards. Ask them to either draw a picture of the word or find a synonym for the word on the same side of the card on which the word is written. On the back of the card write a short definition. Place all the cards in a container (paper sack, box, envelope, etc.) Each member of the group will draw a word from the container, say the word out loud, describe the drawing or tell the group members the synonym for the word, and read the definition on the other side of the card. He/she will then ask another member of the group to use the word in a sentence.

Introduction: Building Background

1. Ask students to look at the front cover of the book and make prediction based on the title, pictures and the following guided questions:

Q: Who do you think the main character in this story is?

A: A girl, Naomi Leon (based on picture and title of book)

Q: Where does she live?

A: In a trailer, in a trailer park (based on picture of airstream trailer)

Q: Where do you think the story takes place?

A: An area with lots of trees could be anywhere as a trailer can be moved from place to place.

2. Continue to build background information by introducing the main characters to the students. On separate pieces of chart paper write descriptions for each of the main characters

listed below. Explain to students that as the class reads the story they will add information about each of the characters. As new characters are introduced, students will post information on separate pieces of chart paper. By the end of the story students will be able to analyze the characters and show how they played a role in helping Naomi become who she was meant to be.

Naomi is a quiet girl who has lived with her brother Owen and great-grandmother for most of her life. She has never had many memories of her father except for one memory right before her mother dropped them off at the door of Gram.

Owen is a cheerful boy who is Naomi's brother. Despite having some physical disabilities, he always makes the best of things. People are usually fooled by his looks, thinking that he is slow in school, but contrary to people's opinions, he gets good grades. Like Naomi, he doesn't remember much about his mother or father.

Gram is the sixty-nine year-old great-grandmother who raised Naomi and Owen for most of their lives. When her granddaughter, the children's mother, comes back and threatens to take Naomi away, Gram takes the children to Mexico in a frantic search for their father.

Skyla Jones is Naomi and Owen's mother who all of a sudden reappears after seven years. When she dropped off the kids seven years ago, she is revealed that she has had major alcohol abuse and irrational behavior. She is mostly pushy and unhappy, except with her boyfriend Clive. Her real name is Terri Lynn.

3. Explain to students that this story is written in the first person. Naomi, the main character is telling her story. One of the things Naomi says she does best is to make lists. Ask students to turn to page 9 and read the kinds of lists Naomi makes, then have students make their own list of "Things I Am Good At."

Modeling/Guided Instruction:

1. Divide students into groups. Read the first paragraph of the story to the students. On one sheet of chart paper, write the following: "There we were, minding our lives with the same obedience as a clock ticking." Ask students to look at the underlined words. Have them answer the following questions:

- What mental pictures do these words paint?
- What is another way of saying, "minding our lives?" (Doing what we normally do each day)
- What does the word "obedience" mean? (without question, without interruption)
- What does the author mean when she compares her life to the obedient ticking of a clock?

Explain to students that an author's use allusions, descriptive idiomatic, and figurative language to appeal to the reader's senses and emotions.

2. On another piece of chart paper write the following: "A few weeks earlier the sun had switched to its winter bedtime, so even though it was early evening, the sky was dark as pine pitch."

On a third sheet of chart paper write, "My thoughts dived into a jumble in the middle of my mind, wrestled around until they were wadded into a fist, and attached themselves to my brain like a burr matted in a long-haired dog."

On a fourth sheet of chart paper write, "We passed the chickens, normally we'd stop to pet them, but Gram and Fabiola had a purpose to their walk." Have students explain the mood and

meaning of the author's word choices. Ask a member from each group to report and post their comments on each chart.

3. Read the book chapter by chapter with the students. Ask them to identify, list on chart paper and analyze the passages in each chapter where the author uses allusions, descriptive idiomatic, and figurative language.

4. As characters interact or are introduced, students will continue to post information about the characters on the character analysis charts.

Review/Assessment: After students have completed the character analysis charts, they will explain how the different characters in the story played a role in helping Naomi become who she was meant to be.

* Also by this author *Esperanza Rising*