

VICTOR MASSAQUOI (10th Grade: Westerville, Westerville Central High School)
Level III Semifinalist
Letter to Pam Munoz Ryan concerning her book, *Esperanza Rising*

Dear Pam Munoz Ryan,

Changes in life can be extremely difficult especially changes that involve your home. Bowie, Maryland was my home for the early years of my life. Bowie was a small and quiet town full of good quiet caring people which was good since it was just outside of the buzzing Metropolitan area of Baltimore. That was my home; I enjoyed everything about it because I lived near my cousins and I never seemed to get the sickness of boredom as a child, I would always be outside doing something outrageous and crazy, even in the winter you could catch me still climbing up a tree or sliding down a slick hill with no sled. I came home from school on a frigid winter day, and my mom told me she had some not so good news for me. I knew it had to be really bad because I rarely hear the “not so good news.” My mom said that we would be leaving for Columbus, Ohio in a few weeks, being young I thought she meant we would be leaving for a vacation of some sort; I didn’t know why she chose Ohio because I knew nothing special in Ohio all I knew was that I had like one aunt there and Ohioans loved their buckeyes. My mom said it wasn’t a vacation we were going on, we would be permanently moving to Ohio since my dad had gotten a really good job there. I hesitated for a minute trying to process what she just said then busted out into tears and ran off to my room not knowing what I was going to do next. I was asking so many questions like why? How will I start all over? Will I make new friends? Why Ohio? What about my home?

My last weeks in Maryland flew by like the Baltimore Metro. My last day in Maryland was very miserable, having to be strong and hold back tears, saying goodbye to all the people I had known for the majority of my life, all the family I was very close to and trying my hardest to not remember all the amazing memories I had with them. When I arrived in Columbus, Ohio I didn’t really know what to think of it. Columbus was bigger than Bowie, the people that I was speaking to sounded nothing like my friends back home, their smiles were nothing compared to the people I had back in Bowie. I started my first day of school a few days after we moved. The school was smaller and we had to wear awful looking navy pants and a simple white polo, the uniforms were disgusting. My first day here at the school my new teacher decided to give us a reading assignment we were supposed to choose a book and read it independently at home, for all my friends who knew me they knew that I HATED to read, especially on my own because every time I tried I either ended up watching television or became drowsy and eventually fell asleep. I just was never able to stuff a bunch of words into my head and try to make something of it. As I was looking on the shelf I found a small little book sitting all by itself on the far left bookshelf. The book was called *Esperanza Rising*, I hesitated about grabbing it because I thought the story was going to be about a girl and all yucky stuff; but I ended by grabbing the book and I didn’t know it then but it would be one of the best decisions I would make. I started reading the book later that day and already was hung into it. I don’t know why I was so interested; maybe it was because the girl in the story was so much like me. I lived in a small town just like the girl named Esperanza, she had everything she could possibly imagine and want at such a young age just like me but she had to give it all up because of situations in her family and she ended up leaving her home and moving to the United States; a place she had no clue about, a place she knew no one just like me. She has to overcome plenty of physical and emotional

obstacles, but she realized that she still had her mom and her grandmother with her who made her realize that maybe not all was lost, that there was still hope, that maybe one day she could return to that state she was in before all this happened. After reading the story I realized that maybe the move was not all bad, maybe I could make something out of Ohio. Even though I did not have all the same friends with me I had no choice but to look forward to the opportunity of finding new ones and creating stronger bonds. Even though I did not have my aunts and my cousins I still had family in Ohio that I did not know so well but I was given the opportunity to get closer to them. Maybe leaving Maryland wouldn't be the worse situation that could happen to me; there might just be something in stored for me in the Buckeye State.

Pam Munoz Ryan, thank you so much for the tale of Esperanza in your novel. The novel taught me a lot and it shaped me not only into a reader but to the person I am today. I realize that at some point in life everyone will have their trials and obstacles to overcome just like Esperanza did but I also realized that there will always be a light at the end of the tunnel only if you believe, have faith and put your heart into it. Even though my situation was not as crazy as Esperanza I learned a lot from the young girl. Today when the candle doesn't shine as bright for me or when I fall and think I can't get back up no matter what situation I'm in: life problems, school, athletics I always think of Esperanza and her story and how she managed to trounce all the odds against her. I strive to be great and do great in everything I do; I strive to never give up because I know that if we fall we can and always will be able to get back up. "We are like the Phoenix," said Abuelita, "Rising again with a new life ahead of us" one of my favorite quotes of all time and my favorite quote from the book. Thank you for letting me know that with Esperanza there is and always will be hope because Esperanza means hope!

Sincerely,

Victor Massaquoi