

The Mestiza and Maternal Labor in *Esperanza Rising*

In the wake of President Trump's recent rescission of DACA (Deferred Action for Children Arrivals), the news media and social media have been eager to articulate positions on the policy based primarily on economics. Whether positive or negative, the appeal to economics largely reifies a clear distinction between native-born American laborers and immigrant laborers.

To counter this divisive public rhetoric, Latino/a children's literature such as Pam Muñoz Ryan's *Esperanza Rising* offers an alternative rhetoric, one built upon women's rhetorical practices. While it is impossible to identify one understanding of women's rhetoric, Annette Kolodny describes it as that which often reverses a violent/coercive language and privileges a shared community. I also draw upon Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald's understanding of woman's rhetoric as the available—and often non-traditional—means of empowering disenfranchised voices.

In a feminist rhetorical move, Ryan deconstructs the emphasis on labor as primarily economic and shifts the emphasis to a symbolic maternal labor. The reproductive process of the earth through its cycles and seasons, represented through the chapter titles, dwarfs an emphasis on the earth's produce as economic commodities alone. Ryan then illustrates the value of a maternal collaboration and nurturing as opposed to public violence. Finally, she advances women's rhetorical labors such as crocheting, cooking, and storytelling as activities that produce legacies rather than short term public change. Ryan enables readers to accept this feminist rhetorical lens through the creation of a protagonist who exemplifies Gloria Anzaldúa's rhetorical construct of the mestiza, a figure who is a combination of multiple cultures, identities, and beliefs. As a character who is both privileged and disadvantaged, *Esperanza* invites readers of various backgrounds to identify with her and with each other. In doing so, the text asks its young readers to equate economic reasoning with a more violent, impersonal rhetoric and to envision social change based on personal stories that embrace identification and an ethic of care.