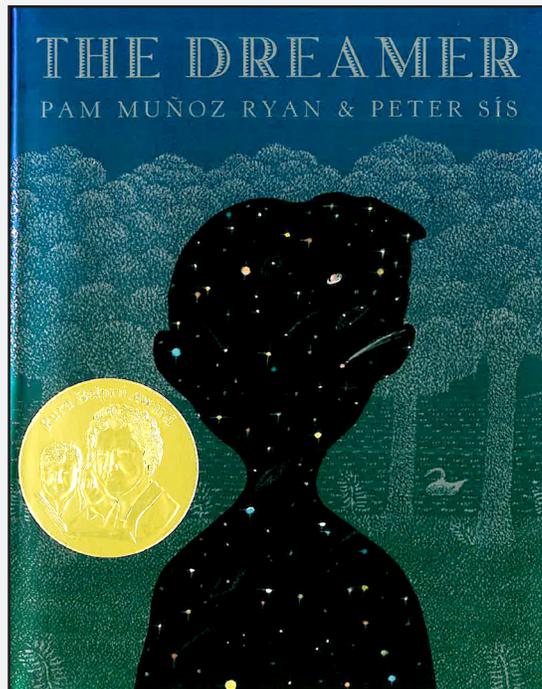


Second Reaction: Pinecone by la Fruta del Pino: Thematic and Craft Considerations of *The Dreamer*

Ryan, Pam Muñoz. *The Dreamer*. Illus. Peter Sís. New York: Scholastic Press, 2010.

Tempie Bowers



Not often do teachers find books to use across grade levels and content areas that are as well crafted as Pam Muñoz Ryan's *The Dreamer*. Winner of the prestigious Pura Belpré Award, *The Dreamer* is part story, part poem, part biography, and part graphic novel that conveys the formative experiences of young Neftalí Reyes, the birth name of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. This book is a treasure chest of writer's craft, offering readers of all ages an engaging and poignant text. I am currently using *The Dreamer* as a read aloud with ninth grade English students as part of a thematic unit titled, "Who Am I?" Our unit of study seeks to answer essential questions about identity, individualism, community, and the transformative experiences that shape our understandings of self and the world.

In *The Dreamer*, the protagonist, Neftalí, must come to terms with who he is and his father's conflicting expectations for him. This incongruity eventually led to Neruda taking

on a nom de plume in order to protect his family's privacy. Neftalí's fascination with the natural world and his attention to words gives the reader a unique insight into the childhood of one of the most famously loved and widely translated poets of the twentieth-century. The themes of family, love, perseverance, hope, and self-discovery make this book accessible and enjoyable for a wide range of readers.

The Dreamer is not only a perfect thematic companion text to my "Who Am I?" unit, but also an exquisite mentor text for the craft of writing. My students, like most high school students around the nation, will be required to take an examination at the end of the year in order to get high school credit for their introductory English literature course. Approximately 40 percent of that exam will be on the elements of literary texts, and *The Dreamer* is ideal for reinforcing figurative language elements such as simile, metaphor, imagery, personification, and onomatopoeia, to name a few. Ryan's skilled craft can be seen as she gives readers a visual and auditory delight in her description of rain water dropping off the ceiling into pots:

plop
plip – plip
bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop
oip, oip, oip, oip
tin,
tin,
tin,
tin,
tin,
tin
plip – plip
plip – plip
plop
(Ryan 7)

Later in the book, she expertly treats the reader to the sounds of crashing waves as heard by Neftalí as he experiences the sea for the first time,

POME
Shwahhhhhh
 Thisssssssssss
POME
 Shwahhhhhh

Thisssssssssss
 Shwahhhhhh
 Thisssssssssss
 Shwahhhhhh
 Thisssssssssss
POME
 Shwahhhhhh
 Thisssssssssss
 (Ryan 163)

Students of all ages will be thrilled with the sensory language that brings Neftalí's world to life. As Neftalí Reyes leaves for the university and becomes the poet Pablo Neruda at the close of the story, our protagonist has undergone a metamorphosis from childhood to adulthood. In addition to the beautiful thematic and craft elements, *The Dreamer* is an exceptional text for teaching about Pablo Neruda and a fine entrée into Latin American history. The cross-curricular options for *The Dreamer* are numerous. History, geography, earth science, and philosophy are all components of this lovely book. Most importantly, the themes of perseverance and self-discovery will speak to readers of any age. As we strive to balance our individual desires with those of the collective, it is important to remember that those who see the world in its smallest measures, pinecone by pinecone, have indeed seen the best there is to see. The poet's mind's eye speaks to us deep in our souls, and that is why poets are so highly revered in most world cultures. Pam Muñoz Ryan has written a beautiful tribute to Pablo Neruda, proving her own gifts and talents to teach and inspire us.

About the Author

Tempie Bowers is a National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certified secondary English teacher and literacy coach in Columbia, South Carolina. She has been an educator for eighteen years. She is a doctoral candidate in the Language and Literacy Department in the College of Education at the University of South Carolina.