

## Pam Munoz Ryan Curriculum Guide and Classroom Resources

Winner of the 2018 Zarrow Award for Young Readers' Literature –  
Pam Munoz Ryan

Lesson ideas for selected reading: *The Dreamer* by Pam Munoz Ryan  
(and Peter Sis)

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Author's web site: [www.pammunozryan.com](http://www.pammunozryan.com) – includes:

- [Short biography of Pam Munoz Ryan](#)
- [Readers' Theatre script introducing "The Dreamer"](#)
- [Discussion questions for "The Dreamer"](#)

### **Lesson: Looking for Faces (Pareidolia)**

In "The Dreamer," objects take on magical qualities. In this activity, students look for and collect pictures of faces in everyday objects.



**"Pareidolia"** is the official term for perceiving patterns (like human faces) in objects where those patterns do not originally exist. Of course, the main character of "The Dreamer," Neftali Reyes – known as Pablo Neruda to the world – would probably disagree about that last part: he saw beautiful patterns and magical qualities in things like socks, twigs, feathers, and coffee cups!

- Introduce students to the concept of "Pareidolia" with a Google Image search. (The above compilation of images comes from such a search.)
- Assign them the task of looking for and capturing (through smart phones or digital cameras) \* as many faces as they can find in everyday objects.

\*If technology is not available, ask students to sketch the faces they find.

- Extensions:
  - Name the different faces and/or choose one to write a character study or sketch about, using this [template](#).
  - Creative writing activity: Write a story in which one of the faces is a character and the problems he/she faces because most humans don't see them as anything other than an object (washing machine, mailbox, etc.).
- Sharing the faces with the class will be the best part! Consider setting up a "Gallery" wall where students can place their pictures and vote for their favorites.

### **Lesson: Neftali Compare & Contrast**

The character of Neftali Reyes in "The Dreamer" is split in two: the Neftali as he really is, and the Neftali his stern father wants him to be. This disconnect is clear from the beginning of the novel, and something that can be traced by students either during reading or after finishing the book.

Ask students to, individually or in groups, complete one character map for the Neftali as he really is and one character map for the Neftali that his father would like him to be, then set the maps side by side to compare and contrast the two.

Extension:

- Students should find specific phrases and sentences to support each of these different "characters".
  - E.g., the Neftali as his father would like him to be is physically strong and not skinny. Evidence: Father says, p. 167, as he forces Neftali and his sister to swim in the ocean: "This is exactly what you need, Neftali. And Laurita, you are becoming far too much like your brother. With any luck, the exercise will build your appetites and make you stronger."

## CHARACTER MAP #1

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

A character map diagram consisting of a central oval labeled "Character" connected to four rectangular boxes: "Feelings" (top-left), "Description" (top-right), "Behavior" (bottom-left), and "Personality Traits" (bottom-right). A small box labeled "GO.5.1" is located at the bottom left of the diagram.

Feelings

Description

Character

Behavior

Personality Traits

GO.5.1

### **Lesson: Magical Realism and "What If?"**

Magical realism is defined as "*Literature in which elements of the marvelous, mythical, or dreamlike are injected into an otherwise realistic story without breaking the narrative flow.*"

"The Dreamer" is a good example of magical realism not just because of strange events that occur (notably, Neftali's visit to the forest, where the rhinoceros beetle grows in size and allows him to ride on its back), but also because of Neftali's unique understanding that there is magic hidden in the everyday – that the beauty of the world is magical in itself, and what is necessary is to recognize that beauty and delight in it without needing explanations.

In this activity, students create a “What If?” scenario that transforms your classroom into a magical place.

- Give each student 6 blank index cards.
- Ask them to divide the cards into 2 stacks. The first stack will be objects. The second stack will be magical actions or qualities.
- On the first 3 cards in the first stack, ask students to list objects they see in the classroom.
- On the second 3 cards in the second stack, ask students to list magical actions (flying, disappearing) or qualities (deep color that shimmers in the light).
- Combine all of the cards from the first stacks into one classroom stack of objects.
- Combine all of the cards from the second stacks into one classroom stack of magical actions or qualities.
- You can divide students into smaller groups, ask that they work on their own, or do this as a whole class:
  - Pick one card from each stack and see if they can be put together.
  - Write the best combinations on the board.
  - Fashion a simple story where an outsider comes into “The Magical Classroom of [your name]” and describe what they see using the chosen combinations.

Extensions:

- This activity cries out for artistic interpretation! Have students draw or paint the classroom and its magical objects.
- For students who want to take this even further, have them create a picture book to share with future classes who will be part of “The Magical Classroom of [your name]” and what they can expect.

### **Lesson: Bag of Magical Objects**

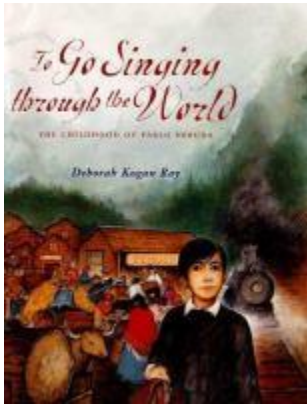
The magic of imagination is suffused throughout “The Dreamer” – the protagonist Neftali Reyes sees the world with eyes of wonder and delight. Help your students “borrow” Neftali’s eyes with this mind-expanding activity.

Preparation: Collect both unusual-looking and easily identifiable small objects that can fit into a bag. (Suggestion: look in your junk drawer!)

- Create suspense about your “Bag of Magical Objects” – carry it carefully into your classroom and ask students not to touch because of the magic inside. (They will know you are not serious, but treat it as such nonetheless for extra fun!)
- You might want to set the “magical” scene by playing soft music and dimming the lights (if possible). As they walk into your classroom, tell them they are walking into another, more magical world.
- Tell them you want them to open their minds and to see beyond what the objects inside look like and identify what they *could* be, if the world was really governed by magical realism.

- Pull out each object and pass it around, saying, "I want you to look at each object carefully. Don't blurt out any of your thoughts; keep them inside your head for now. Ask yourself, What could this be?, then write down your ideas."
- When all objects are passed around and students have written down their ideas, ask them to share.

### **Lesson: Pablo Neruda Biography Scavenger Hunt**



An excellent companion work to read aloud to your class or have students read in small groups is the picture book biography "[To Go Singing Through the World: The Childhood of Pablo Neruda](#)" by Deborah Kogan Ray.

It can be used either as a way to build background knowledge before reading "The Dreamer" or as a way to consolidate knowledge after reading the novel.

Either way, ask students to find short biographies of Pablo Neruda on the **Biography In Context** database available through the Tulsa City-County Library web site\* and complete a "Biography Scavenger Hunt" about Pablo Neruda using this simple template in Appendix A: Biography Scavenger Hunt.

\*[www.tulsalibrary.org](http://www.tulsalibrary.org) – "Research & Learn" – "Alphabetical list of Resources" – "Biography In Context". (You will have to enter a current and valid library card number to access.)

### **Lesson: Freewriting Poetic Questions**

Pam Munoz Ryan decided to write "The Dreamer" in part because she read and was inspired by his collection, "The Book of Questions." Ryan writes: "Neruda's spirit of inquiry was contagious and inspired me to create the voice of poetry and the questions in my text. I hope readers will retreat into their own wandering thoughts and imagine answers."

- In this lesson, that is exactly what students will be doing: responding to the different poetic questions that Ryan poses in "The Dreamer."
- For example, this question: "Does a metamorphosis begin from the outside in? Or from the inside out?" is an excellent one for students to respond to in writing. If you already have a freewriting routine established with students, they know to write as quickly as they can and as fast as their thoughts appear in response to the question or topic at hand.
- (During freewriting, students "should allow thoughts to meander, writing as ideas come to mind. They should go down alleyways in the mind that could not be explored in a formal essay requiring transitions and logical placement of ideas." [Lesson on www.readwritethink.org](#))

- The questions can also be used in more formal responses to plot points and character analysis in "The Dreamer". For example, the metamorphosis question can be found on p. 336, after Neftali decides to change his name to Pablo Neruda. Ask students to respond specifically to the text: "What metamorphosis is Neftali making? How is changing his name a change from the outside in? How else is his metamorphosis to a poet named Pablo Neruda an 'inside out' one?"
- The question "From what are the walls of a sanctuary built? And those of a prison?" (p. 193) occurs in the chapter when Neftali's father forces him to swim in the ocean every day, which Neftali despises. Yet he adores the nature of the town they are in, especially the swans. Ask students to consider, in writing, in what ways the seaside vacation is a sanctuary, and what ways it is a prison.

See Appendix B for some of the poetic questions used in "The Dreamer."

Extension:

- Ask students to write their own poetic questions. (If necessary, give them a list of nouns as jumping off points: mailbox; shoes; rainbows; bananas; etc.)
- Artistic students may want to illustrate their questions, or do different illustrations than the ones included in "The Dreamer."

### **Lesson: "Ode to My Socks" Pattern Poetry**

One reason Pablo Neruda is so accessible to different audiences is his frequent writing about everyday objects, of which "Ode To My Socks" is an example. (See Appendix C.)

1. Read the poem out loud.
2. Ask students to read the poem again to themselves and note the comparisons Neruda makes, of the socks and his feet, to other things.
3. Make a list of beautiful objects (especially clothing items) that students own.
4. Using the pattern from "Ode to My Socks" (see Appendix D), ask students to choose one of the objects and write the introduction to a new poem – "Ode To My Hat" or "Ode To My Belt".
5. Share!

## **Book Reviews of "The Dreamer"**

### **Booklist:**

Gr. 4-8 /\*Starred Review\*/ Re-spinning the childhood of the widely beloved poet Pablo Neruda, Ryan and Sís collaborate to create a stirring, fictionalized portrait of a timid boy's flowering artistry. Young Neftali Reyes (Neruda's real name) spends most of his time either dreamily pondering the world or cowering from his domineering father, who will brook no such idleness from his son. In early scenes, when the boy wanders rapt in a forest or spends a formative summer by the seashore, Ryan loads the narrative with vivid sensory details. And although it isn't quite poetry, it eloquently evokes the sensation of experiencing the world as someone who savors the rhythms of words and gets lost in the intricate surprises of nature. The neat squares of Sís' meticulously stippled illustrations, richly symbolic in their own right, complement and deepen the lyrical quality of the book. As Neftali grows into a teen, he becomes increasingly aware of the plight of the indigenous Mapuche in his Chilean homeland, and Ryan does a remarkable job of integrating these themes of social injustice, neither overwhelming nor becoming secondary to Neftali's story. This book has all the feel of a classic, elegant and measured, but deeply rewarding and eminently readable. Ryan includes a small collection of Neruda's poetry and a thoughtful endnote that delves into how she found the seeds for the story and sketches Neruda's subsequent life and legacy. -- Chipman, Ian (Reviewed 02-01-2010) (Booklist, vol 106, number 11, p44)

### **School Library Journal:**

/\* Starred Review \*/ Gr 4-9— Readers enter the creative, sensitive mind of Pablo Neruda, the Nobel Prize-winning poet, in this beautifully written fictional biography. Ryan artfully meshes factual details with an absorbing story of a shy Chilean boy whose spirit develops and thrives despite his father's relentless negativity. Neruda, who was born Neftali Reyes, sees, hears, and feels poetry all around him from an early age. Luckily he finds understanding and encouragement from his stepmother and his uncle, whose humanitarian and liberal attitudes toward nature and the rights of the indigenous Mapuche people greatly influence his developing opinions. In early adulthood, Reyes starts using the pseudonym by which he becomes known, taking his last name from that of a famous Czechoslovakian poet. Ryan suggests that this was how he hid his activities from his father. Her poetic prose style totally dovetails with the subject. Interspersed with the text are poems that mimic Neruda's style and push readers to think imaginatively and visually. Sís's whimsical pen-and-ink pointillist illustrations enliven the presentation. Each chapter is preceded by three small drawings that hint at something to come. The perfect marriage of text and art offers an excellent introduction to one of the world's most famous poets. An appended author's note gives further insight into Neruda's beliefs and accomplishments. In addition, there are excerpts from several of his poems and odes. This unusual selection would be a fine companion to Deborah Kogan Ray's *To Go Singing Through the World* (Farrar, 2006). —Renee Steinberg, formerly at Fieldstone Middle School, Montvale, NJ --Renee Steinberg (Reviewed April 1, 2010) (School Library Journal, vol 56, issue 4, p168)

### **Publishers Weekly:**

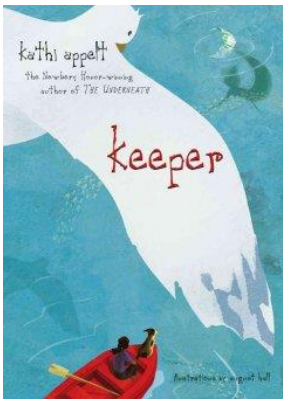
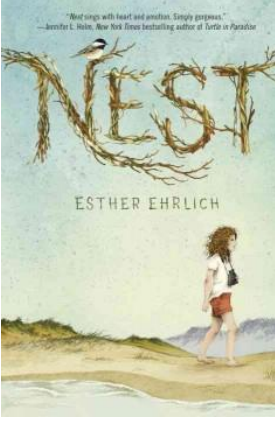
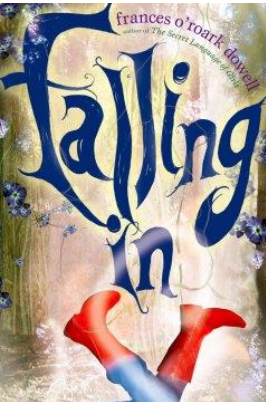
*/\* Starred Review \*/* Ryan's (Paint the Wind) wandering and imaginative prose and Sís's (The Wall) quietly haunting art fuse in this fictionalized account of Pablo Neruda's upbringing in the small town of Temuco, Chile. Precocious, terribly shy, and insightful, Neruda (known then by his birth name, Neftali Reyes) is curious about all facets of life, particularly the wonders of nature. "He stood, captivated, feeling small and insignificant, and at the same time as if he belonged to something much grander," writes Ryan when Neftali first sees the ocean. His role model is his uncle Orlando, who owns the local newspaper, but his domineering father has no patience for the boy's daydreaming and love of reading and writing, which ultimately provokes Neftali's passion for finding his own voice. Printed in green ink (as is the text), Sís's stippled illustrations provide surreal visual teasers for each chapter. Larger images pair with poetic questions ("Is fire born of words? Or are words born of fire?") that echo Neruda's *The Book of Questions*. Stressing "the importance of following dreams and staying determined," the book is an immaculately crafted and inspiring piece of magical realism. Ages 9–14. (Apr.) --Staff (Reviewed March 15, 2010) (Publishers Weekly, vol 257, issue 11, p55)

### **Kirkus:**

*/\* Starred Review \*/* Ryan's fictional evocation of the boy who would become Pablo Neruda is rich, resonant and enchanting. Simple adventures reveal young Neftali's painful shyness and spirited determination, his stepmother's love and his siblings' affection and his longing for connection with his formidable, disapproving father. The narrative captures as well rain falling in Temuco, the Chilean town where he was raised, and his first encounters with the forest and the ocean. Childhood moments, gracefully re-created, offer a glimpse of a poet-to-be who treasures stories hidden in objects and who recognizes the delicate mutability of the visible world, while the roots of Neruda's political beliefs are implied in the boy's encounters with struggles for social justice around him. Lines from a poem by Ryan along with Sís's art emphasize scenes and introduce chapters, perfectly conveying the young hero's dreamy questioning. The illustrator's trademark drawings deliver a feeling of boundless thought and imagination, suggesting, with whimsy and warmth, Neftali's continual transformation of the everyday world into something transcendent. A brief selection of Neruda's poems (in translation), a bibliography and an author's note enrich an inviting and already splendid, beautifully presented work. (Historical fiction. 9-13) (Kirkus Reviews, March 15, 2010)

## Related Novels

If you are looking for books similar to *The Dreamer*, you might want to consider these titles:

	<p><a href="#">Keeper</a> by Kathi Appelt</p> <p>Ten-year-old Keeper believes in wishes and magic, and why shouldn't she? Her mother, gone for the last seven years, is a mermaid, after all! So on the day of the Blue Moon, when everything she does has a disastrous result, Keeper knows her only option is to row out past the sandbar to the treacherous open water of the Gulf of Mexico, accompanied by BD (Best Dog) and Captain the seagull, and hope her mermaid mama can tell her how to fix things.... Filled with love, wild adventure, family drama, and even a touch of true fantasy, this is a deeply satisfying tale. (Starred review by School Library Journal)</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> Gentle and observational fiction, like "The Dreamer."</p>
	<p><a href="#">Nest</a> by Esther Ehrlich</p> <p>On Cape Cod in 1972, eleven-year-old Naomi, known as Chirp for her love of birds, gets help from neighbor Joey as she struggles to cope with her mother's multiple sclerosis and its effect on her father and sister.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> Both "Nest" and "The Dreamer" are reflective, deeply emotional stories with characters who have special connections to animals and nature.</p>
	<p><a href="#">Falling In</a> by Frances O'Roark Dowell</p> <p>Middle-schooler Isabelle Bean follows a mouse's squeak into a closet and falls into a parallel universe where the children believe she is the witch they have feared for years, finally come to devour them.</p> <p><b>Reason:</b> Like "The Dreamer," this is an excellent example of magical realism – while there are certainly fantasy elements, the emotional truth of the protagonist is the principal feature. Humorous elements will appeal to kids who like funny novels.</p>

## **Appendix A: Biography Scavenger Hunt**

# **Biography Scavenger Hunt**

Someone: (Who is your subject?)

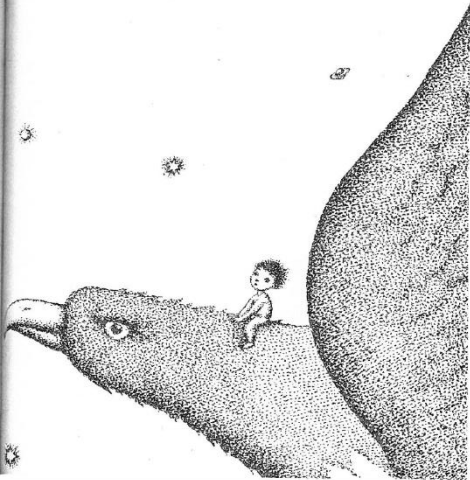
Famous for: (What are the person's main accomplishments?)

BUT: (What struggles or challenges did the person face?)

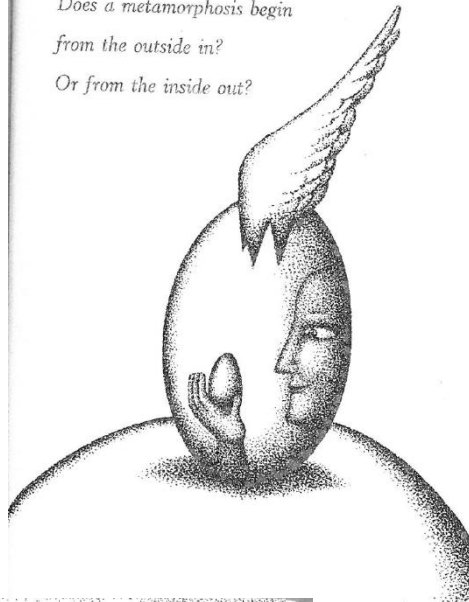
THEN: (How did the person overcome it all?)

## Appendix B: Poetic Questions in “The Dreamer”

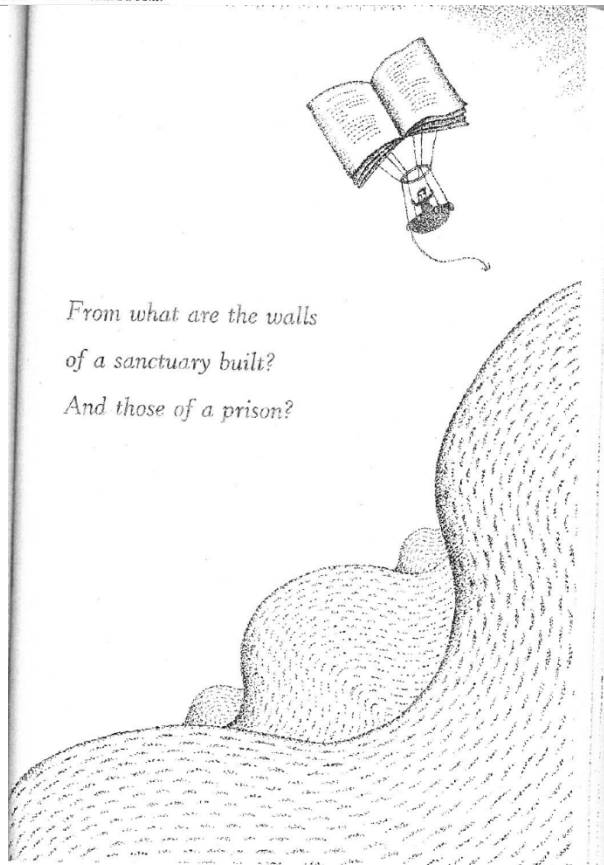
*What wisdom does the eagle whisper  
to those who are learning to fly?*



*Does a metamorphosis begin  
from the outside in?  
Or from the inside out?*



*From what are the walls  
of a sanctuary built?  
And those of a prison?*



## **Appendix C: “Ode To My Socks” by Pablo Neruda**

### **Ode To My Socks**

Maru Mori brought me  
a pair  
of socks  
that she knit with her  
shepherd’s hands.

Two socks as soft  
as rabbit fur.

I thrust my feet  
inside them  
as if they were  
two  
little boxes  
knit  
from threads  
of sunset  
and sheepskin.

My feet were  
two woolen  
fish  
in those outrageous socks,  
two gangly,  
navy-blue sharks  
impaled  
on a golden thread,  
two giant blackbirds,  
two cannons:

thus  
were my feet  
honored  
by  
those  
heavenly  
socks.

They were  
so beautiful  
I found my feet  
unlovable  
for the very first time,  
like two crusty old  
firemen, firemen  
unworthy  
of that embroidered  
fire,  
those incandescent  
socks.

Nevertheless  
I fought  
the sharp temptation  
to put them away  
the way schoolboys  
put  
fireflies in a bottle,  
the way scholars  
hoard  
holy writ.

I fought  
the mad urge  
to lock them  
in a golden  
cage  
and feed them birdseed  
and morsels of pink melon  
every day.

Like jungle  
explorers  
who deliver a young deer  
of the rarest species  
to the roasting spit  
then wolf it down  
in shame,  
I stretched  
my feet forward  
and pulled on  
those  
gorgeous  
socks,  
and over them  
my shoes.

So this is  
the moral of my ode:  
beauty is beauty  
twice over  
and good things are doubly  
good  
when you're talking  
about  
a pair of wool  
socks  
in the dead of winter.

## Appendix D: Pattern Poem for "Ode To My Socks"

**Ode To** \_\_\_\_\_ [choose a piece of clothing]

\_\_\_\_\_ [person you know] brought me  
\_\_\_\_\_ [piece of clothing from title]  
that [he/she] \_\_\_\_\_ [how did the person you know get the piece of clothing].

\_\_\_\_\_ [piece of clothing] as \_\_\_\_\_ [descriptive word] as \_\_\_\_\_ [compare to another thing].

I thrust my \_\_\_\_\_ [body part that the clothing goes on]  
inside [it/them]  
as if [it/they] were  
\_\_\_\_\_ [compare to another thing]  
made \_\_\_\_\_ [by another thing].

My \_\_\_\_\_ [body part] [was/were]  
\_\_\_\_\_ [compare to an animal]  
in [those/that] outrageous \_\_\_\_\_ [piece of clothing] ,  
\_\_\_\_\_ [descriptive word],  
\_\_\_\_\_ [thing or animal],  
\_\_\_\_\_ [another thing],  
\_\_\_\_\_ [another thing].