

DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE DREAMER

BY PAM MUÑOZ RYAN

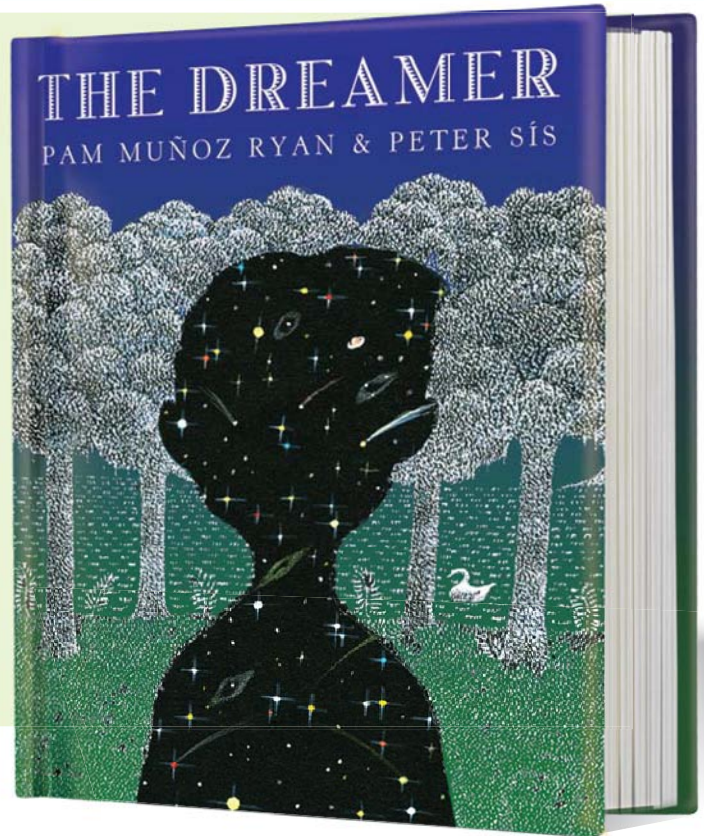
ILLUSTRATED BY PETER SÍS



ABOUT THE BOOK

Neftalí is a dreamer. He loves words, birds, forests, and the sky. But his father expects him to be practical, concentrate on his studies, and prepare for a career in business. Slowly Neftalí learns to believe in himself, defy his father, and trust his own vision...a vision that makes him grow up to become one of the foremost poets of the twentieth century.

This imaginative exploration of the boyhood of Pablo Neruda takes readers on a rare journey of the heart and imagination, and brings hope and confidence to every child who has struggled against the odds and dreamed of a larger world.




BEFORE READING

Look up information about the country of Chile—its geography, climate, political history, and indigenous people, especially the Mapuche. Find out what is unique about the part of the country near the city of Temuco, where most of this story takes place.


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Father forbid Rodolfo to sing and Neftalí to daydream? What is the effect on the entire family when Father is at home?
2. What is the significance of Neftalí losing his mittens and his father's hat in the first chapter?
3. Why does Rodolfo say about Father that he passes out invitations (to dinner) like overripe plums? What kind of man is José Reyes and why does he try to control his family so completely?
4. Compare Neftalí's father with his uncle Orlando. How are these men alike and how are they different?
5. Why is Neftalí's first trip to the forest so important to him? How does the trip affect his relationship with his father and his understanding of his own nature?
6. What is the significance of the chucao bird that Neftalí hears in the forest? See a picture of this bird: www.arthurgrosset.com/sabirds/chucaotapaculo.html

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7. Throughout the story, the author has inserted bits of poetry. Discuss the meaning of this question in the Forest chapter:

*Which is sharper? The hatchet that cuts down dreams?
Or the scythe that clears a path for another?*

Why is that phrase inserted in this chapter?

8. Who do you think is the mysterious child who leaves the toy sheep for Neftalí? Why don't they meet? Why is the sheep so important to Neftalí when he doesn't even know who gave it to him?
9. What does Neftalí learn about himself during the trip to the ocean and his summer there? Discuss the poetry inserted in the Lagoon chapter: "From what are the walls of/ a sanctuary built?/ And those of a prison?" Identify the sanctuaries you have found in your own life.
10. Why is the wounded swan so important to Neftalí and why is he reluctant to share it with his sister Laurita? What does it mean to them when they do take care of the swan together?
11. Discuss the effect on the children of the swimming routine in the ocean. What feelings does Neftalí have toward his father at the end of the summer?
12. Why does Guillermo ask Neftalí to write to Blanca for him? How does she know who actually wrote the letters?
13. What is the importance of thirteen-year-old Neftalí's job with his uncle? Why is Uncle Orlando's newspaper office burned to the ground? What does Orlando mean when he says, "many whispers can make a very loud noise"?
14. Find out more about the Mapuche Indians in Chile. Discuss their importance in this story. Compare their history to other examples where indigenous people have been displaced, or their rights violated, by new settlers and the spread of industrial society.
15. Discuss the question: "Is fire born of words/ Or are words born of fire?" How does this question relate to the fire in the newspaper office and the later time when Father burns Neftalí's notebooks?
16. Discuss Neftalí's comment that his father was "so controlled by his own past that he dared not allow anyone he loved to control their own future."
17. What prompts Neftalí to start to use the name Pablo Neruda? Discuss the question: "Does a metamorphosis begin/ from the outside in/ Or from the inside out?" What is Neftalí's metamorphosis? What events of his childhood do you think are the most significant in shaping his character as a man?
18. How do the illustrations in this book further your understanding of the words and ideas presented here? What part does the artist play in your experience of the story?
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FOR FURTHER READING

Chile (Enchantment of the World series), by Michael Burga. Children's Press, 2009.

Chile, by Charles J. Shields. Mason Crest Publishers, 2009.

Chile in Pictures, by Francesca Davis Dipiazza. Twenty-First Century Books, 2007.

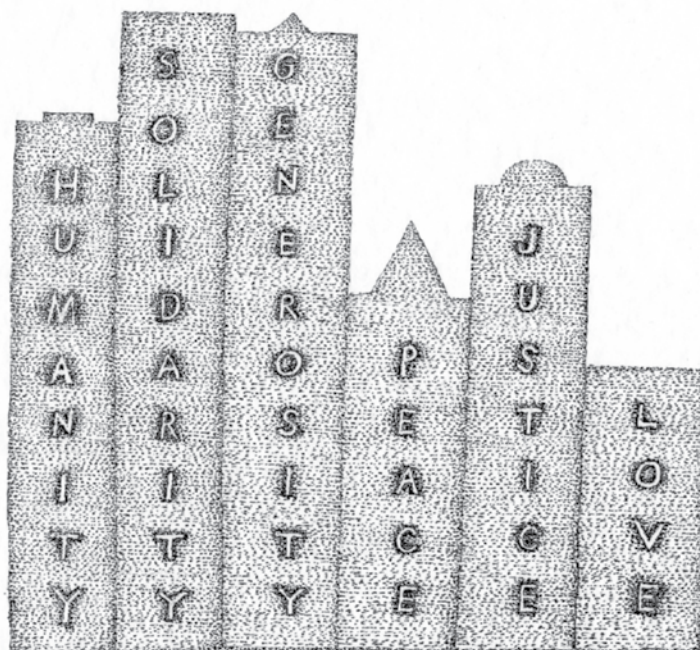
Culture and Customs of Chile, by Guillermo I. Castillo-Feliu. Greenwood Press, 2000.

Birds of Chile (Princeton Field Guides), by Alvaro Jaramillo.
Illus. by Peter Burke and David Beadle. Princeton University Press, 2003.

Mariana and the Merchild: A Folk Tale from Chile,
by Caroline Pitcher. Illus. by Jackie Morris. Eermans, 2000.

To Go Singing Through the World: The Childhood of Pablo Neruda,
by Deborah Kogan Ray. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2006.

When I Was a Boy Neruda Called Me Policarpo: A Memoir, by Poli Delano. Trans.
by Sean Higgins. Illus. by Manuel Monroy. Groundwood Books, 2006.



WEB SITES

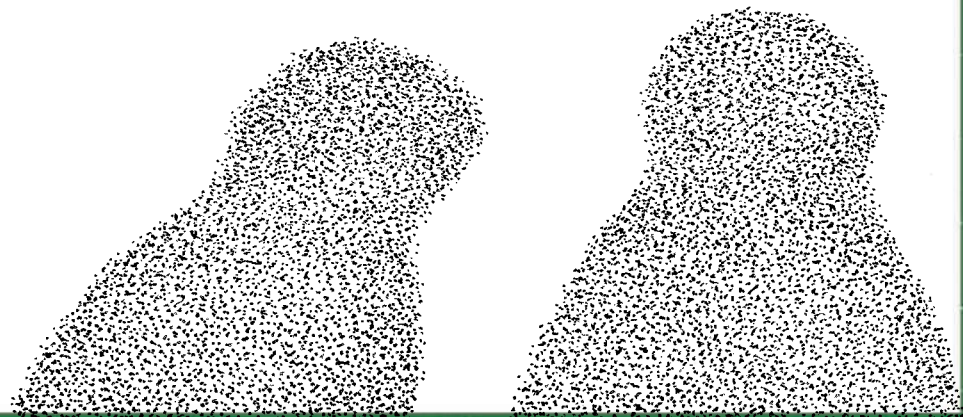
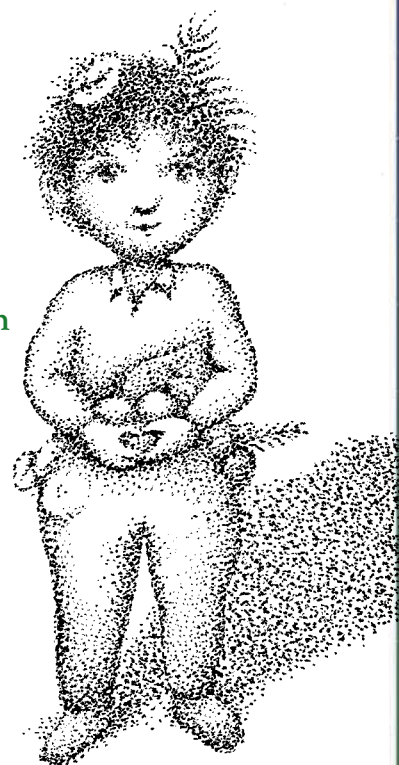
Events of Neruda's life with photographs of his early years:
www.fundacionneruda.org/ing/biografia_ingles1904.htm

Compare Temuco today with the town where Neftalí grew up:
<http://www.geographia.com/chile/temuco01.htm>

General information about native people of Chile:
www.beingindigenous.org/

Learn more about the Mapuche people of Chile:
www.mapuche-nation.org/english/main/feature/m_nation.htm

For teachers – information on sharing poetry with students:
www.poetryfoundation.org/programs/children.html
<http://poetryforchildren.blogspot.com/>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pam Muñoz Ryan has written more than thirty books for young readers, and has garnered many awards including NEA's Human and Civil Rights Award, the Virginia Hamilton Literary Award, the Pura Belpré Medal, the Jane Addams Peace Award, and the Schneider Family Award. Before becoming a writer, she worked as a bilingual teacher and an administrator, and has a master's degree in education. She lives with her husband about thirty miles north of San Diego near the Pacific Ocean.



Photo credit Sean B. Masterson 2010

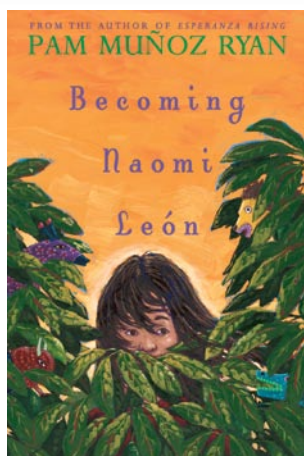


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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Since coming to America from Czechoslovakia, Peter Sís has worked as an artist and in film before becoming a children's book author and illustrator. He has won the Sibert Award and three Caldecott Honors for his picture books including *Starry Messenger: Galileo Galilei*, *Tibet Through the Red Box*, and *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*. He lives in New York City with his family.

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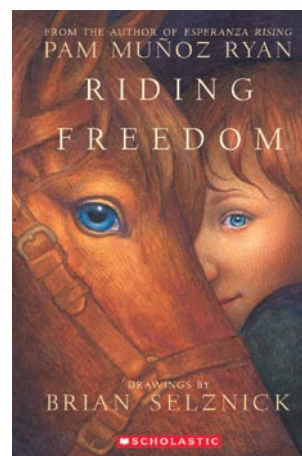
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