

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Shadow of a Bull

by
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Book Information

Maia Wojciechowska, Shadow of a Bull
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The son of a famous bullfighter resists the pressures that try to force him to become a bullfighter like his hero father.

Award: Newbery Medal

Topics: Emotions, Fear; Family Life, Growing Up; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Choose a Challenge: Decisions; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8

Main Characters

'El Magnifico' a boy who is wounded while working as a comic bullfighter

Alfonso Castillo a bullfighting critic who encourages Manolo to speak his own mind and not let others push him to be something he is not

Count de la Casa a bull breeder who mentored Juan Olivar and arranges for Manolo's tianta

Jaime García Manolo's best friend

Juan García Jaime's brother, who has a natural inclination towards bullfighting; he is invited to come to Manolo's tianta, where he has an opportunity to prove himself

Juan Olivar the town of Arcangel's hero; a renowned bullfighter who met his death while fighting a bull

Manolo Olivar the principal character of the story; a young boy who is expected to grow up to be a bullfighter like his famous father

Maria Alvar the gypsy who made the prediction when Juan Olivar was a baby that he would become Spain's greatest matador

Miguel García Juan and Jaime's father; he is embittered by his lack of success in the bullfighting ring

the aficionados the six men who have supported Señora Olivar and Manolo since Juan's death; they introduce Manolo to the art of bullfighting

the doctor an old man who specializes in the care of bullfighters' wounds

Vocabulary

deprive to take something away from

infirmary a place to care for the sick

lithe bending easily

nocturnal at night

poach to take something illegally

preoccupation total attention or absorption

Synopsis

Nine-year-old Manolo Olivar is expected to grow up to be a great bullfighter like his legendary father, Juan Olivar. The people of his town, Arcangel, Spain, talk of Juan and bullfighting constantly. When Juan died in the bull ring at the age of twenty-two, the town erected statues, shrines, and museums in his honor. Manolo was only three at the time and remembers nothing of his father. Now, the townspeople see in Manolo, who looks remarkably like his deceased father, the promise of a new hero. They anxiously await Manolo's twelfth birthday so that he can face his first bull in a tianta (the testing of young bulls and heifers). However, Manolo knows he is a coward, afraid to do many of the daring things most boys his age enjoy.

Six men who were his father's greatest fans begin to take Manolo to bullfights and tutor him in bullfighting lore. He is frightened at first and always feels sorry for the bulls. His mother does not object to the arrangement because the men have generously supported her and Manolo since her husband died. Manolo begins to practice in secret using his grandfather's cape so he will not disappoint the men when the time for his tianta comes.

Count de la Casa, a bull breeder, had given Juan Olivar his first tianta and sponsored him. The Count had been aware of a gypsy's prediction at Juan's birth that Juan was to become a great bullfighter.

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The Count now meets with Manolo every year, and this time decides Manolo will make his *tienta* when he is eleven. Manolo feels cheated out of a year of his life, quits going to bullfights, and plays like a normal boy with his friend Jaime García. Eventually, Manolo realizes he cannot run away from either his fears or the expectations of the Count and the six men. He goes to see Jaime's brother, Juan, who illegally capes pastured bulls at night. While there, he also meets Juan's father, Miguel, a bitter and reclusive man who had once worked for Juan Olivar. Miguel was later fired because he was thought to be drunk, when he was actually blind in one eye. Feeling guilty, Manolo promises to take Juan to his *tienta* with him. Later that night Juan and Manolo meet as planned, and Juan lets Manolo cape a bull that is to be used in a circus ring. The circus or comic bullfights were a lighter form of entertainment than the traditional bullfight, often using less experienced matadors and dangerous "used" bulls. Manolo is frightened and sickened by this ordeal.

Two days later, Manolo learns from the six men that a boy, 'El Magnifico,' was gored in the circus fight by the same bull Manolo had caped at night. He follows the men to the boy's house, where he helps the elderly doctor who specializes in gorings to clean and treat the wound. He realizes doctoring is where his heart lies.

Juan García has been given permission to come to Manolo's *tienta*. As the time approaches, Manolo is haunted by nightmares. He seeks to learn if his father had ever been afraid, but he finds no answers. He talks with his mother and learns that his father fought the bulls because it was what he wanted. Even when the people expected more and more of him and he became very tired of fighting, he continued because it was in his blood. The night before the *tienta*, Manolo prays to La Macarena that he will find his courage so his mother will not be ashamed of him.

When Manolo arrives at the *tienta* with the six men and Juan, he is introduced to the great bullfighting critic, Alfonso Castillo. Seeing no fervor in Manolo, Castillo asks if anyone has asked Manolo if he

wants to be there. They laugh at his question. However, Castillo shares privately with Manolo that bravery means doing things in spite of fear. He echoes Manolo's mother's sentiments to be true to his own self. Manolo says he will.

When the bullfight begins, Manolo does well with the first passes with the cape. However, when he goes for the *muleta*, or red cape used near the end of the fight, he begins to falter. He tells the men he no longer wants to fight and suggests that Juan García go into the ring. The men allow it, and Juan impresses the crowd. Manolo wanders over to the old doctor sitting in the stands, who tells Manolo that his study to become a doctor can now begin.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why is Alfonso Castillo so sure Juan Olivar would not have allowed Manolo to make his *tienta* at eleven?

*Alfonso knew and trusted Juan Olivar. Juan Olivar did not get to be a great matador by coincidence or luck. He knew what it took to stare a bull down, and because of his own experience with the town and the gypsy's prophecy for him, he also knew about the pressure a town could put on a young boy. In spite of prophecy and pressure, Juan knew that it was necessary to have *afición*, or an intense desire, in order to be a bullfighter. That only comes from within. Alfonso knew Juan well enough to know he would want what was best for his son. Juan knew that things do not happen according to a formula, but rather in the heart. He would not have expected Manolo to make a decision for life at age eleven.*

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Literary Analysis

In what way are the people of Arcangel antagonists in this story?

The people of Arcangel like the recognition that Juan Olivar has brought to the town. They make him a legend and the source of their pride. In a land where saints are glorified and worshipped, he is like a patron saint to them. Manolo is surrounded by the town's constant talk about his father. He can never escape it. The town is small, and everybody knows him and where he lives. Because he looks so much like his deceased father, they wish to make Manolo a copy of Juan. They are antagonists because they never ask Manolo what he wants for himself. Instead, they dictate and dominate his life. Manolo must fight off their demands in order to find what he wants for himself.

Inferential Comprehension

What is the old doctor inferring when he says that the tragedy of boys like 'El Magnifico' is that they know of nothing else they want to do and that he has grown old looking at wasted lives?

Sociologists see examples of people like 'El Magnifico' striving to be someone famous as a way of climbing out of an impoverished condition. In many places where the future holds little hope for the vast majority of residents, young people put all their hopes and energy into being something they have little chance of achieving. They become so focused on their goal that they often give up their schoolwork or chance at other vocations. When an injury occurs and their dream is shattered, they have nothing else to substitute for it, and their lives become wasted. Miguel García is an example of what the doctor means. Juan García would have fit this profile were it not for the lucky break Manolo gave him. The doctor hopes 'El Magnifico,' as well as Manolo, will see this.

Constructing Meaning

"Living in a fishbowl" is an expression sometimes used to describe the lives of children of famous people. Manolo was such a child. He was the child of a living legend in a small town. Many children grow up among these same conditions and expectations -- the minister's children who are expected to be perfect, the movie star's children who are expected to be talented, the politician's children who are expected to be politically astute, etc. What do you see as the problems and benefits of growing up in such a situation?

Answers will vary. The students should try to identify both the pros and cons of the situation. The positive side may include the smoother ride to fame, the benefits accompanying the revered position of the parent, such as more wealth and privilege, and less worry about day to day existence. The negatives may include the lack of privacy, the fear of failure, and the constant pressure to be good.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors

Bullfighting is part of the culture of many towns in western Europe. The students may wish to research the origins of the bullfight and its evolution into the phenomena it is today, attracting tourists from around the world. They can write a report on their research findings.

Comparing and Contrasting A barber treats 'El Magnifico' before the doctor treats him. Students should research the role of barbers in medical history. They can make a poster comparing the role of barbers in the past to the roles of barbers and doctors in modern times.

Recognizing Details The reader is bombarded with many unfamiliar words and concepts in this story. To make things more comprehensible to the reader, have the students pretend they are opening a school for bullfighting and need to make a school supply list for the items the students need to purchase. Since the incoming students would be ignorant of the terms, each item must be illustrated and its purpose

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explained. The pictures with descriptions may be displayed around the classroom.

Identifying Persuasive Language Stage a debate in the classroom over the ethics of bullfighting. Have students choose a position, such as protesting bullfighting as a violation of animal rights or justifying it as an art form, etc. Rules of the debate should be established and students should be encouraged to research their positions and then use persuasive language in order to sway listeners to their point of view.