

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for And Now Miguel by Joseph Krumgold

Book Information

Joseph Krumgold, And Now Miguel

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The secret wish of Miguel Chavez, to go to the mountains with the men of his family, comes true.

Award: Newbery Medal

Topics: Countries/Regions, Mexico; English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 3, Chapter 14, 90%; Natural Environments, Mountains; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Count on Me: Responsibility; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8

Main Characters

Blasito Miguel's oldest brother; he is also called Young Blas

Bonifacio one of Miguel's two uncles

Eli one of Miguel's two uncles

Faustina Miguel's youngest sister

Gabriel Miguel's nineteen-year-old brother

Grandfather the elder Chavez, who started the family in sheep ranching

Juan Marquez (Johnny) one of two brothers from Colorado who travel from ranch to ranch as sheep shearers

Juby Miguel's oldest friend and classmate

Leocadia one of Miguel's older sisters

Miguel Chavez the main character; he is the twelve-year-old son of a sheep ranching family near Taos, New Mexico

Mr. Chavez Miguel's father; also called Old Blas

Mrs. Chavez Miguel's mother

Pedro Miguel's seven-year-old brother

Salvador Marquez (Salph) a sheep shearer; Johnny's brother

Tomasita one of Miguel's older sisters

Vocabulary

arroyo a gully made by a small river or flooding stream

butte a sudden rise of land in an otherwise level area

colic pain in the abdomen

juniper a shrub-like tree related to pines, with aromatic blue fruits that look like berries

liniment a medicated liquid for rubbing on the skin to ease muscle aches

veranda a roofed porch along the side of a building

Synopsis

Twelve-year-old Miguel Chavez lives on a sheep ranch near Taos, New Mexico, in the late 1930's or early 1940's. His family has been herding sheep for generations. When his father works tending, shearing, branding, or birthing sheep, Miguel wants to be noticed for the help he gives but instead feels like he is an invisible person with no identity at all. He feels that life is difficult because everything he wants or needs seems to come hard for him.

Life for his nineteen-year-old brother, Gabriel, seems easier to Miguel. Gabriel is naturally good at everything: sports, work, studies, popularity. Miguel quietly envies him for, as he says, it seems easy for Gabriel to be Gabriel, and for Pedro, a younger brother, to be Pedro, but it is hard for Miguel to be Miguel.

Perhaps the hardest aspect of life for Miguel is his own youth. He is too old to be a child like Pedro, but he is too young to be an adult. Miguel yearns for the day he will be old enough to go on a drive to take the sheep to the high summer pasture in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. As he looks at the mountains from his room, he aches to go there and enjoy the manly life the men describe each year. Miguel asks his father if he can go on the drive to the high pastures that summer. His father replies that he is still too young.

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One day at school Miguel's long-time friend, Juby, says that several head of Chavez sheep have been sighted across the river. Hoping that finding the lost sheep will prove his maturity, Miguel skips school and searches for the sheep. His father is angry with him for skipping school but very proud of him for returning the lost sheep. Even with this, Miguel still is not permitted to go to the mountains.

Knowing Miguel's wish, his father does begin to include Miguel in more of the responsibilities of the ranch. When the sheep are branded, Miguel keeps track of the matching numbers of the ewes and the lambs. It is an important job, for if a ewe loses her lamb, she forgets it and rejects it. The men praise Miguel for keeping track of the hundreds of numbers for the ewes and new lambs.

Later, when shearing time arrives, Miguel does an excellent job of keeping the floor swept so that the pure wool is not contaminated with dirt and other droppings. He works so industriously that the men call him "Twister." Despite his success, his father still refuses to give him the permission he seeks.

In his persistent efforts to reach the mountains, Miguel tries prayer. He prays to San Ysidro, the patron saint of farmers, that he will be selected to accompany the men in the family on the drive this year. The prayer is answered, but with a consequence for which Miguel is not prepared.

One day, Miguel's little sister, Faustina, comes to tell him that he is to go on the drive. Excitedly, he runs home to confirm Faustina's news. It is true; he will be going on the drive because Gabriel has received his draft notice and will have to leave for army basic training the day the drive begins.

Miguel's initial excitement turns into despair because he feels he made a bad prayer to San Ysidro. It seems that what the saint gave Miguel, he took from Gabriel. Miguel confesses to Gabriel that he is responsible for Gabriel's draft notice. He tells his brother about his solemn prayer to San Ysidro and asks Gabriel why a saint cannot bestow good fortune without bad fortune for someone else.

Gabriel explains that events and situations of the world confuse things so much that well-intentioned saintly acts are tarnished. He adds that the draft notice is not really a terrible thing. Gabriel says he has lived his whole life on their ranch and he loves it, but the experience in the army will answer his own prayer to see some of the world outside the ranch.

The day of the drive finally arrives. Gabriel departs for basic training, and Miguel begins the journey into the mountains that he has wished to make for so long.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Miguel wants to go on the sheep drive very badly. Why does his father repeatedly tell him he cannot go?

For anyone in the family to go on the sheep drive, a certain level of maturity and responsibility must be attained. Miguel's father is probably trying to allow Miguel to be a child awhile longer before increasing the expectations of him.

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Literary Analysis

Even though Miguel does not realize it, the men in his family are helping him prepare for the greater responsibilities of tending the sheep in their summer pastures in the mountains. What increasingly responsible jobs does Miguel perform that help him grow?

Miguel, like all the children in the family, is very familiar with all aspects of raising sheep. From the time the children are little, they are expected to help whenever and wherever needed. Miguel tells of fetching bags or liniment to help during lambing, of hauling firewood, and of herding sheep into shearing pens or pastures as needed. As he gets older, he helps with the numbering of ewes and lambs; he searches for lost sheep; he sweeps the shearing shed so no dirt gets into the wool coats; and he helps load the rolled wool coats into huge bags.

Inferential Comprehension

Miguel and Gabriel each have prayers answered. How are the answers to their prayers good and bad for each?

Miguel's answer to his prayer to go to the mountains with the men and sheep makes him very happy. In his mind, he is accepted as one of the "men" in the family and is mature and responsible enough to handle this important task. The negative aspect of having his prayer answered is that for him to go to the mountains, someone else will not go. In this case, it is Gabriel, whom Miguel idolizes, who will be leaving home to join the army. Gabriel's prayer is answered both positively and negatively. He is happy to be leaving the ranch for a while to see some of the world, but he knows he will miss his home and family.

Constructing Meaning

Before leaving for the mountains, the large tent is found to need mending and patching. Uncle Bonifacio tells Miguel that they will take care of fixing it together when they come down. Miguel tells his uncle, "I'm sorry, ... I can't think about coming down, yet. Only about going up." What does he mean?

Miguel has been anticipating and preparing for going to the mountains for so long that he cannot imagine his life past the present. It is enough to anticipate the coming wonder of finally being allowed to go into the mountains with the sheep and the men of the family. There are too many unknowns in the coming weeks in the mountains for him to even consider the fact that he will have to come back down to his home and school in the fall.

Teachable Skills

Comparing and Contrasting Miguel wants to go to the mountains believing he will then be accepted as one of the men of the family. In almost every culture, boys Miguel's age are faced with rites of passage, which are used to reclassify boys as men. Many wish to meet the challenge of these rites, or performances, long before the time is appropriate. Have the class identify rites of passage in current society such as obtaining a driver's license or voting. Next have the students research a rite of passage in another culture. Class discussion can focus on the similarities and differences.

Understanding the Author's Craft Miguel and Gabriel have different views of Gabriel's notice from the draft board resulting in his leaving home and Miguel's first trip to the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Have the students write two letters to imaginary friends describing these events. One should be written from Gabriel's point of view, the other from Miguel's.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors The area in which the Chavez family pastures their sheep during the summer is part of the Carson National Forest. They are happy to have a permit for grazing their sheep, and the ranger carefully

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documents the number of sheep going into the mountains. Have the students research the history and criteria for grazing rights on public lands. A class discussion or debate could center on the positive and negative aspects of grazing rights.

Recognizing Details The Chavez family uses the diamond hitch knot to secure loads to the mules. Obtain a Boy Scout handbook or books on camping and sailing to provide further information on knots. Bring a supply of ropes or cords of varying lengths to class so students can each practice a certain type of knot and then demonstrate it to the class.