

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Power and the Glory

by

### Graham Greene

### Book Information

Graham Greene, The Power and the Glory  
Quiz Number: 8669  
Penguin Putnam, 1962  
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Book Level: 5.9  
Interest Level: UG

This is a suspenseful story about a hunted, driven desperate priest in Mexico.

**Topics:** Adventure, Escape; Countries/Regions, Mexico; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Popular Groupings, Upper Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Religion, Christianity

### Main Characters

Brigitta the priest's daughter

Coral Fellows a young girl who helps the priest hide in her family's banana shed

Maria the woman with whom the priest had a brief affair and the mother of his child

Padre Jose a former Catholic priest who has complied with Mexican laws by taking a wife and no longer performing Catholic services

the Chief of Police the corrupt police chief in the capital city of Tabasco

the half-caste or mestizo a poor man who recognizes the priest and tries to turn him in to the authorities in order to collect the reward money

the Lehrs a middle-aged sister and brother who are staunch Lutherans, but who give refuge to the priest

the lieutenant the government official who is in charge of finding the whisky priest

the whisky priest the main character; a Catholic priest who is being sought by the government for illegally performing Catholic ceremonies

### Vocabulary

**conspicuous** noticeable; attracting attention

**pious** excessively religious

**renounce** to give up, refuse, or resign, usually by formal declaration

**sacrilege** violation of something consecrated to God

**treason** the attempt by overt acts to overthrow the government of the state to which one owes allegiance

### Synopsis

This story is about a Catholic priest living in a southern state of Mexico during a time when Catholicism is outlawed by the government. Since he refuses to conform to the law by taking a wife and ceasing to perform his religious duties as a priest, he is on the run and being sought by the government, specifically a lieutenant set on capturing him. The priest goes from town to town seeking refuge and staying one step ahead of the lieutenant. The villagers in the places he stays refuse to turn the priest in to the authorities and therefore suffer when the lieutenant begins taking and killing hostages from each of these villages in hopes of changing their minds.

The priest meets many people along the way including a dentist, Mr. Tench, the young daughter of a banana plantation owner, Coral Fellows, and his own daughter, Brigitta. At one point he meets a poor mestizo who wishes to turn him in, in order to gain the reward money being offered. The priest realizes this and parts ways with the man. He later meets the man in jail when he spends an evening in jail for possessing liquor. The man does not turn him in at this point because he is being comfortably kept by the government, and he thinks he won't be rewarded for it since the priest is already in custody.

Upon being released from jail, the priest returns to Coral's home to seek refuge. He finds the home and area to be deserted except for an Indian woman with a dead child. The priest decides to head north over the mountains into a state where the law is not as strictly enforced. The Indian woman follows him until they reach a burial area where she lays her child to rest. The priest continues on and finds himself taken in by a middle-aged brother and sister,

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who happen to be Lutheran. In the village near their home, he is asked to baptize children, hear confessions, and say Mass. He soon realizes he is close to returning to his old ways as a parish priest, but wonders if he wants to do so.

Just before he leaves this village to go to a bigger town where he would be welcomed as a priest, the mestizo who originally intended to turn him in to the authorities arrives with the story of a dying American criminal who wishes to receive absolution before he dies. The priest realizes he is being taken into a trap set by the lieutenant, but he goes to the dying man anyway. There he again encounters the lieutenant, who then returns him to the capital city for execution. Through their discussions along the trail back to the city, the priest and lieutenant come to understand one another. Before his death, the priest requests to have his own confession heard, and the lieutenant agrees to ask the only other priest around to do it. The married priest refuses, and the priest is executed--thus becoming what he deems himself, an undeserving martyr for his religion.

### Open-Ended Questions

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

#### Initial Understanding

Most people believe that the chief of police is an honest person working to protect the citizens of a town or city. The chief of police in this story is corrupt and dishonest. Find examples of this in the story.

*He gambled with the people (playing cards). He advocated breaking the law by letting the lieutenant have power outside his jurisdiction. He drank liquor with the governor's cousin and the whisky priest.*

#### Literary Analysis

The whisky priest recognized that the half-caste was to be his Judas. What does this mean?

*Judas was the man who betrayed Jesus to the soldiers, even though he claimed to be one of Jesus's friends. The priest realized that this man was going to turn him in to the authorities.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

The lieutenant's motivation for putting an end to the Catholic church in Mexico is to stop the priests from abusing the people. What is the irony of his hunt for the whisky priest?

*He killed and abused the people in order to get his way. This seems to be no better than what he accuses the church of doing.*

#### Constructing Meaning

The Lehrs seemed to act as though bad things did not happen. They tended to think that if they didn't look and acknowledge it, then it couldn't exist. What do we sometimes call this behavior? What's wrong with this behavior?

*You could say it is like an ostrich burying its head in the sand. It could be argued that if you aren't a part of the solution, then you're part of the problem.*

### Teachable Skills

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** The religious persecution that is depicted in this story may seem unbelievable to most readers since it does not exist today in most civilized areas of the world; however, it does still exist in parts of the world. Sometimes this persecution involves death and severe punishment, and sometimes it is as minor as name-calling. Have students read a newspaper or listen to a newscast in order to find examples of religious persecution that still exists today. Discuss the reason it exists and what things have been done to try to end it. Or, have students research other examples of religious persecution in history.

**Extending Meaning** Though they chose different

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avenues to deal with the government's demands, the whisky priest and Padre Jose both feel unworthy of their titles as priests. Split the class into teams to list each man's "sins" and prepare to debate who was the better man or chose the better path. Have students support their arguments with the priests' own arguments against themselves.

**Responding to Literature** When the whisky priest met Coral, she offered to always help him when he needed her. She even suggested they use Morse code to be safer in their communications with each other. Have students study Morse code and learn to use it to send messages. Look up other more sophisticated codes and try to use them. Analyze and try to understand the methods behind most codes. Have students devise their own secret codes and see if other students can crack the codes.