

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Search for the Shadowman

by

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Book Information

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Book Level: 4.9

Interest Level: MG

While working on a genealogy project for his seventh-grade history class, Andy Thomas becomes determined to solve the mystery surrounding a distant relative who was accused of stealing the family fortune.

Topics: Family Life, Misc./Other; Mysteries, Thefts; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 9+; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Science, Genealogy; U.S. States/Regions, Texas

Main Characters

Andy Thomas the seventh-grade boy who discovers the truth about his ancestor, Coley Joe

Elton Gillie the caretaker of the cemetery

Grandma Dorothy Andy's grandmother

Grandpa Zeke Andy's grandfather

J.J. Andy's best friend

Miss Winnie Bonner Andy's great-aunt, who is embarrassed by the family history

Miz Minna Gasper J.J.'s great-grandma, who hides the truth about Coley Joe and her ancestor, James Jonathan Gasper

Mr. Hammergren Andy's teacher

Mr. Thomas Andy's father

Mrs. Alonzo the librarian

Mrs. Thomas Andy's mother

Vocabulary

fortify to make strong

incriminate to charge with or involve in a crime

obelisk a four-sided pillar that becomes narrower toward the top and ends in a pyramid

Synopsis

Seventh-grader Andy Thomas must write a paper about his family history. His great-aunt, Miss Winnie Bonner, gives him a box of family documents. A line is drawn through Coley Joe Bonner's name in the family Bible. Miss Winnie refuses to discuss Coley Joe, saying it could cause trouble.

Andy sets about learning about Coley Joe. Miz Minna, his best friend J.J.'s great-grandma, confirms that Coley Joe existed, but will not tell him why he was crossed out of the Bible. Andy discovers a hidden picture of Coley Joe in the box of documents. Coley Joe looks so friendly--and so like Andy--that Andy knows he could not have been a bad person. He learns that Coley Joe is believed to have stolen his family's money and run away.

During his search, Andy receives two warnings to stop. Andy suspects that J.J. sent the warnings. J.J. denies sending the messages, reminding Andy that they are best friends. Andy realizes he needs to trust his best friend. J.J. tells Andy that he has told Miz Minna about Andy's search for Coley Joe.

Based on a variety of sources, Andy concludes that Coley Joe may have been killed in riots in San Elizario during the Salt Wars, rather than running away with his family's money. He obtains an old newspaper article about the riots via e-mail. A man found dead during the riots wore a horseshoe nail hammered into a circle and hung on a leather thong around his neck. All of the Bonner men wore this family symbol; Andy has found Coley Joe.

Then, Andy finds two letters tucked into Coley Joe's mother's poetry book. They prove that Coley Joe was murdered by James Jonathan Gasper, Miz Minna and J.J.'s ancestor. Clearly, Gasper stole Coley Joe's family's money and used it to begin businesses in Hermosa.

Miz Minna tells Andy that she has evidence that Coley Joe was a thief and reads from Gasper's journal. Andy realizes Miz Minna does not really believe what Gasper wrote either, and that she has

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been sending the warning messages so that Andy will not discover the truth about her relative.

Andy reveals enough about what he has learned to clear Coley Joe's name. He keeps the information about James Jonathan Gasper to himself, not wanting to hurt his best friend or cause others more pain.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

What did Andy do at the end of the story that showed he was proud to be a Bonner?

He wore the leather thong with the Bonner family's circle around his neck night and day.

Literary Analysis

The theme is the central idea of a book. What is the main theme of *Search for the Shadowman*? How do Andy's actions illustrate the theme?

The main theme is stated by the caretaker of the cemetery: "...there are some things, like the big answers, you got to figure out for yourself." Andy not only figures out the truth about Coley Joe for himself, but, more importantly, he figures out how much of the information is appropriate to reveal. He reveals enough to clear his ancestor's name, but not so much as to hurt his best friend and his family.

Inferential Comprehension

What did Andy and Miz Minna have in common?

They both wanted to feel proud of their ancestors.

Constructing Meaning

What did Andy do with the information he learned about James Jonathan Gasper and Coley Joe? Why? Do you think he did the right thing?

Andy told only enough information to exonerate Coley Joe; he did not reveal that James Jonathan Gasper robbed and murdered his relative and built his fortune with the stolen money. Andy hid the incriminating papers in a locked box in his closet, presumably forever. He did so to protect people, including his best friend, from being hurt.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Literary Features The theme of *Search for the Shadowman* is that people must find the answers to the "big questions" for themselves. Andy answers an important "big question" for himself when he makes the decision to reveal only a part of the truth about the past. Ask the students to reflect upon how they have been allowed to make more and more of their own decisions and come to their own conclusions as they have grown older. What decisions that they now make for themselves did parents, caregivers and teachers previously make for them? What decisions are they looking forward to making for themselves as they get older? What are some of the "big questions" that ultimately have to be answered? These questions could be addressed either in a class discussion or in writing.

Understanding Characterization An interesting aspect of the characterization of *Search for the Shadowman* is the choice of Miz Minna--an elderly woman--as the antagonist. Ask the students to name other books with unlikely antagonists. Then ask them to write a few journal entries from Miz Minna's point of view about Andy's search and her fears that Andy will learn the truth about her revered ancestor.

Understanding the Author's Craft Joan Lowery Nixon's knowledge of and research about Texas history--e.g., her knowledge of the Salt Wars--are critical to her mystery story. Are these facts true?

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Help the students learn how to check them. Then, help the students identify resources from which they can learn interesting facts about their state's history. Instruct them to write a short story in a genre of their own choosing using the facts they have learned.

Responding to Literature Genealogy and the search for one's roots play an important role in *Search for the Shadowman*. Ask the students to discuss their family history with their parents, or, like Andy, with their oldest living family member. Have them prepare a short talk to present to the class. Interesting or humorous stories could be emphasized. Does the family have any "black sheep"? How are they looked upon today? The students could bring family photos or memorabilia to share with the class.