

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Star of Luis

by

Marc Talbert

Book Information

Marc Talbert, Star of Luis
Quiz Number: 36572
Clarion Books, 1999
ISBN 0-395-91423-X; LCCN
181 Pages
Book Level: 4.2
Interest Level: UG

Just after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, an American boy of Hispanic heritage goes with his mother from Los Angeles to New Mexico to meet her family for the first time, and while there, he discovers his family's hidden Jewish heritage.

Topics: Community Life, Prejudice; People, Jewish; People, Mexican American

Main Characters

Antonio Medrano Luís's young uncle on his father's side; he befriends Luís when Luís comes to Las Manos

Eduardo Luís's domineering friend in Los Angeles; he tends to be very judgmental of Jewish people but lets go of his racism when it threatens his relationship with Luís

Fidel an aggressive and untrustworthy boy who befriends Eduardo while Luís is away; he steals Eduardo's money and allows Eduardo to blame Luís

Luís Medrano a young adolescent boy growing up in Los Angeles during World War II; he discovers that his family is hiding the fact that they are Jewish

Mr. Medrano Luís's father, who enlists in the army when Pearl Harbor is bombed

Sabine Chacón a Jewish classmate of Luís in Las Manos, who tries to trick him into eating deer droppings

Sarah Medrano Luís's mother, who takes Luís to Las Manos when she finds out her father is dying

Stan Oppenheimer a Jewish boy in Luís's neighborhood; he was one of Luís's best friends until religious instruction for the two boys interfered with their friendship; Luís renews their friendship at the end of the story

Uncle Solomón Luís's kindly and good-humored uncle who is a priest; he tells Luís that their family is Jewish

Vocabulary

burro a small donkey

catechism religion classes

queasy sick to the stomach, nauseous

synagogue Jewish house of worship

vigil a watch or a time of guarding over a person or place

zoot suit a two-piece suit with particularly wide shoulders, narrow waist, flared hips, and narrow ankles; it was popular in the 1940's

Synopsis

Star of Luís tells the story of a young boy named Luís Medrano living in the 1940's. For the third Sunday in a row, Luís and his friend Eduardo sneak away from Mass with the hope of joining a baseball game. The game is interrupted when the boys find out that Japan has bombed Pearl Harbor.

When Luís wakes up the next morning he finds out his father has joined the army. Luís notices his father starts wearing a cross. When Luís's father leaves for boot camp, Luís's mother puts a six-pointed star in the window.

Two weeks before Christmas, Luís's mother quits her job because she has received a letter saying her father is ill. Luís has never met his parents' families, and he is reluctant to move to Las Manos, New Mexico, to live with his mother's family. Before Luís leaves, Eduardo gives Luís a crucifix because Luís does not have any in his own house.

When Luís and his mother arrive in Las Manos, Luís is surprised to find out his Uncle Solomón is a priest. Luís is also surprised by the difference between Las Manos and Los Angeles. Las Manos is a rural town with a one-room schoolhouse and mud-walled homes.

While he is adjusting to his new home, Luís makes

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Star of Luis

by

Marc Talbert

friends with Antonio, who turns out to be his father's youngest brother. Luís discovers there is a rift between his parents' families because his mother's family disapproved of the marriage between his parents. During this time Luís also develops a camaraderie with Uncle Solomón.

One day Luís's mother takes Luís to get shoes. When they return, they discover Luís's grandfather has died. Uncle Solomón and Luís go to ask a neighboring family for help. Overwrought by his father's death, Uncle Solomón blurts out that Luís's family has been hiding their identity as Jewish people for hundreds of years. Luís is extremely upset with this revelation because his classmates and friends often mock Jews. He does not want to believe Uncle Solomón, but he listens to the family history. Soon afterward Uncle Solomón has to return to his own home.

After several months in Las Manos, Luís's mother suddenly decides to return to Los Angeles. She makes arrangements to stay temporarily with Eduardo's family, but Luís does not want to go back. On the train he abruptly demands to know why his mother has never told him they were Jewish. His mother and he discuss the secret on the way to Los Angeles.

When Luís and his mother arrive at Eduardo's house, Luís does not find Eduardo at home. He goes wandering through the neighborhood and ends up standing in front of the house of Stan, a Jewish boy with whom he used to play. Stan suddenly comes out and invites Luís inside. Luís joins him in building model airplanes.

When Luís returns to Eduardo's home, he finds Eduardo in his room with a boy named Fidel. Luís learns that they had followed him to Stan's house, and the two boys mock Luís for playing with a Jew. While Luís is defending himself and Stan, he lets slip that Eduardo buries his money in the dirt floor of the garage. That night, Eduardo's money is stolen out of the garage. In the morning Eduardo accuses Luís, and the boys fight again. Luís goes off to play with Stan.

Later that day, Luís and Stan take a model airplane to fly in the cemetery. When Fidel and Eduardo arrive, Luís fights Fidel and accuses him of stealing Eduardo's money. Fidel accidentally confesses and then runs off.

At bedtime, Eduardo tells Luís that in order to maintain their friendship, Luís will have to give up Stan. Luís refuses and says that he is still willing to be friends with Eduardo. The story ends with Luís and Eduardo going with Stan to visit the synagogue.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Why does Luís's father decide to enlist in the army?

Luís's father lost his job fighting in a war and has not yet found a new one. He knows the army will pay him, and is better than no job. He also likes the idea of fighting "for truth, justice, and the American way," and he considers this an opportunity to prove his loyalty to America.

Literary Analysis

Why does Luís's mother get upset when Luís speaks Spanish?

The people of Las Manos identify with their Spanish heritage, but they are not Mexican. Luís's mother does not want people to think Luís is Mexican, partly because she is Jewish and partly because Mexican-Americans are being deported by Immigration without being given a chance to prove they are citizens of the United States. When Luís's mother returns to Las Manos, where they are safe from deportation, she speaks Spanish and allows Luís to do so as well.

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Star of Luis

by

Marc Talbert

Inferential Comprehension

Why does Luís renew his friendship with Stan when he gets back from Las Manos?

While Luís encounters Stan purely by accident while he wanders the neighborhood after returning to Los Angeles, there are a variety of reasons for him to reestablish his relationship with Stan. Not only has Luís recently found out that he is the same religion as Stan, but Luís misses Stan even before this. Eduardo often does not share the same outlook as Luís and frequently insists that Luís do things that Luís would rather not do, while Stan and Luís seem to appreciate many of the same things. Luís actually prefers Stan's company, especially after Luís finds out that Eduardo is extremely antagonistic towards him when Luís returns from Las Manos.

Constructing Meaning

What does Uncle Solomón mean when he asks Luís if "blood is thicker than holy water"?

He is asking if Luís thinks that loyalty to one's family and their traditions is more important than religion and obeying the requests of the Catholic Church. He is also asking Luís if he thinks honoring this heritage is worth risking everything, since Luís's ancestors could have been executed as heretics if agents of the Spanish Inquisition ever found out that they were secretly practicing Judaism.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Luís's family is obviously worried about the consequences of publicly admitting they are Jewish. Have the students research the persecution of the Jewish people during the Spanish Inquisition and the Russian pogroms. Allow the students to discuss how the information they read affects their understanding of what motivated Luís's family to keep their religious background a secret.

Comparing and Contrasting When Luís travels from Los Angeles to Las Manos he is overwhelmed by the contrast between the two places. Have the students explore these

differences by drawing pictures of both of Luís's homes in this story.

Making Predictions Luís's idea of who he is changes dramatically in this story, and as he grows older, he will probably have to make some difficult choices about how he identifies himself. Have the students imagine what Luís will be like when he grows up. Have them write a description of Luís's adult life.

Understanding the Author's Craft Luís is often plagued by violent nightmares that stand as a metaphor for his worries about certain events. Have the students pick one of these nightmares and explain what the nightmare means and why Luís might have had that particular nightmare.