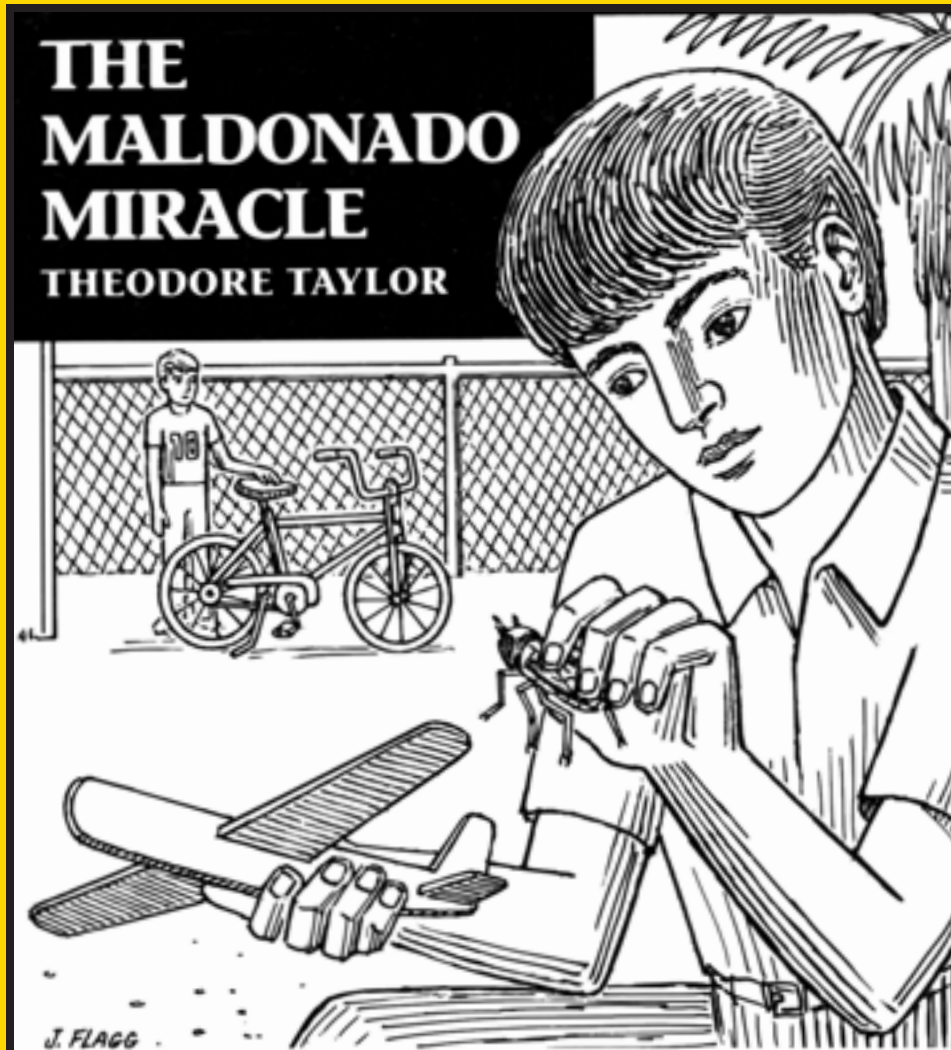


Novel·Ties



A Study Guide

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LEARNING LINKS

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For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide consists of lessons to use in conjunction with the novel *The Maldonado Miracle*. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different novel at its reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for reading development by distributing the novel and a folder to each child. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits, formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques, will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Mexican Immigration

California, Texas, New Mexico, most of Arizona, some of Wyoming, and large parts of Colorado, Nevada, and Utah were acquired by the United States as a result of a war with Mexico that lasted from 1846 to 1848. When the Civil War (1861-1865) caused a labor shortage, the United States began importing foreign workers, including Mexicans, to toil in the fields and construct railroad lines. The inflow of contract laborers from Mexico increased sharply during World War I. So much labor was needed after our sudden entry into World War II that the United States government started a program to recruit tens of thousands of Mexican laborers, called “braceros,” for work in this country.

The bracero program was a boon for growers, who got cheap labor without having to supply any benefits. When the program ended in 1964, more than two hundred thousand Mexican workers were suddenly forced out of the United States. Growers still wanted Mexican labor, and the poor Mexicans were still desperate to work. This led to an increase in the number of illegal immigrants into the United States.

Illegal Mexican immigrants enter the United States in many ways. Some swim the Rio Grande into Texas, thus gaining the name “wetback.” Others pay smugglers, called “coyotes,” to arrange their trips. Some of these coyotes are no better than crooks who rob or desert their clients as soon as they enter the United States. Coyotes are rarely caught by the authorities. More likely, the border police catch “mules,” the drivers of the vehicles used to transport the aliens. Illegal aliens pay anywhere from \$50 to \$1,500 to be smuggled into the United States. The smuggling of aliens is a large-scale, highly organized business.

Migrant Farm Workers

Although some migrant farm workers settle in one area for seasonal work, many others move continually all year round. They either travel to follow the crops or work with one grower who provides them with work in several locations.

The life of a migrant farm worker, legal or illegal, is a difficult one. Many migrants have no legal contract stating wages or length of work. The housing conditions range from fair to deplorable; most workers live in makeshift homes without hot water or adequate toilet facilities. Farm workers may rise at five in the morning and work until six or seven at night. They keep working during freezing rains or under the blazing sun, stooping and picking in backbreaking labor.

The Mexican workers are usually families who travel together. Young children work in the fields because their poor families need the money gained from their wages. These children often do not attend school. Those who do rarely stay in one place long enough to receive a full year of education in one place. There are, however, migrant programs that can help children enroll in the correct classes and obtain the proper credits to continue in and graduate from school. A growing number of young Mexicans and Mexican Americans realize that education is the primary means by which they can have a better life than their parents.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Many Americans, resenting illegal aliens coming into the United States, favor tougher laws to weed them out. Read the Background Information on page three of this study guide and do some additional research into the problem of illegal aliens who enter the United States from Mexico. What do you think is the best solution for this problem? Reevaluate your solution after reading the novel.
2. What does the word miracle mean to you? Do you believe in miracles? Why or why not?
3. Have you ever had difficulty understanding your parents or getting them to understand you? Brainstorm with the class to come up with ways to improve communication between children and their parents. Then try some of these methods with your parents.
4. How important are a person's dreams for the future? What dreams do you have for yourself? Do you think they will come true? Why or why not?
5. In this novel, opportunists are quick to try to cash in on a "miracle." In a cooperative learning group, discuss other instances of people trying to take economic advantage of a serious situation or incident. What is your opinion of these people?
6. In what way is faith a positive thing? Is it still positive when it becomes "blind faith"? Explain.
7. Look at a map of Southern California and the Baja Peninsula of Mexico. As you read the novel, trace the route that Jose takes from his home in Mexico to the Haines's Farm in California. Looking at the map, why do you think that illegal immigration is a problem in California? What other states receive Mexican immigrants?
8. In talking about one of his novels, Theodore Taylor, the author of *The Maldonado Miracle*, stated the following:

The characters were drawn from real-life, as they are in all my books. I stress that I don't have a very good imagination. I'm still basically a reporter, finding it easier to work from real-life models.*

How important do you think it is for a novelist to have a good imagination? Explain. What advantages are there in using real-life models for the characters? In what way, if any, might this be a disadvantage?

* From *Something about the Author*, Vol. 54, p. 145. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1989.)