



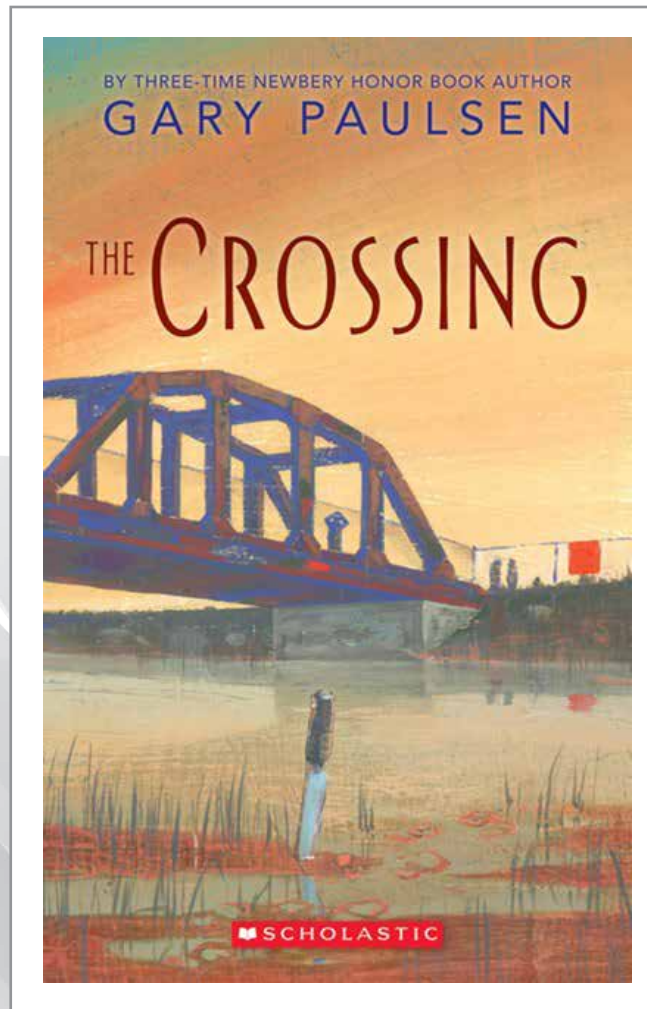
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Crossing

Gary Paulsen



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Crossing

Gary Paulsen

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Research, brainstorming,
compare/contrast

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,
cause/effect, summarizing

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral reports

Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,
applications,
synonyms/antonyms,
parts of speech

Writing

Creative writing, essay,
obituary

Literary Elements

Plot development,
symbolism, conflict, irony,
theme, characterization

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—geography;
Science—memory;
Language—military jargon;
Art—sketch, dramatization,
brochure; Music—
appropriate selections;
Current Events—magazine
and newspaper articles

Genre: young-adult fiction

Setting: Juárez, Mexico, 1980s

Point of View: third-person omniscient

Themes: survival, courage, friendship, perseverance, duty

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. society

Style: straightforward narrative

Tone: serious

Date of First Publication: 1987

Summary

Manny Bustos is a 14-year-old orphan struggling to survive on the streets of Juárez, Mexico. He begs for everything he has, lives in a cardboard box, and dreams of crossing the border and starting a new life in the United States. After a failed effort to cross the river, Manny finds Sergeant Robert Locke in an alley behind a bar and tries to steal his wallet. This encounter sets the stage for other meetings between the sergeant and orphan. The sergeant is deeply troubled by his experiences in the Vietnam War and drinks alcohol constantly to keep from remembering his deceased friends. He and Manny eventually bond, and Robert agrees to help Manny cross the border to the United States. However, Manny is threatened by a street gang, and Robert is mortally wounded as he disposes of the four thugs. As his final act, Robert gives Manny his wallet and urges him to cross the border so he can start a new life.

About the Author

Gary Paulsen is a three-time Newbery Honor Award winner. He has written more than 175 books, 200 articles and short stories, and several plays. Throughout his life he has been a carnival worker, an engineer, a ranch hand, a construction worker, and even a dog sled driver, competing three times in the Alaskan Iditarod. Paulsen draws inspiration for his stories from history, nature, and his varied experiences. Some of Paulsen's most popular books include *Hatchet*, *Brian's Winter*, *Dogsong*, and *The Winter Room*. Paulsen and his wife spend part of the year at their home in New Mexico and the rest of the year on a boat in the Pacific Ocean.

Characters

Manny Bustos: 14-year-old orphan, raised by nuns, begs on the street for money and food in Juárez, has red hair and is smaller than others his age

Sergeant Robert Locke: sergeant in the United States Army, served military duty all over the world, troubled by events in Vietnam, drinks daily to forget deceased friends, has two personalities—rigid sergeant and caring, sensitive man

Maria: a cook, works at the Two-by-Four café and bar, feeds Manny tortillas and chicken when she can

Pacho: older boy who bullies Manny for money under the Santa Fe Bridge

Chapters 4–6

Robert arrives in Juárez for an evening of heavy drinking, intent on rendering himself “brain dead.” Manny attempts to cross the Rio Grande and is almost caught by a street gang. After narrowly escaping them, Manny finds Robert vomiting in the alley behind the Club Congo Tiki and decides to steal his wallet. As he begins to slide the wallet from Robert’s back pocket, Robert grabs Manny’s wrist. He releases Manny at the border after a confrontation with a Mexican policeman.

Vocabulary

garishly
obliterating
devious
culvert
congregate
tactics
hesitated
defying
swiveled
guttural
careened
khaki
condemn

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Robert think the Club Congo Tiki is “an insane place to go insane” (p. 27)? Explain why you think he chooses to drink there. (*The Congo Tiki is an ugly bar with a door in the shape of an open-mouthed native. The atmosphere is kitschy and bizarre. There Robert drinks to lose himself, to escape reality. Answers will vary, but drinking in such a decidedly surreal environment likely makes it that much easier to lose touch with the real world. It also makes his depressing experiences in the club seem less real, less a part of him.*)
2. Why does Robert consider getting drunk to be “work”? (*Robert does not enjoy drinking; it is merely a means to an end. He drinks steadily and deliberately, and he must be careful to do so at such a pace that he does not get too drunk and pass out. At the same time, he must stay consistently drunk enough that his brain is in a fog and the painful memories of his lost friends do not surface.*)
3. What does Robert think are the characteristics of a “macho man”? Why do you think it does not really bother Robert that he may not be a macho man? (*A macho man drinks his liquor hard and fast, spits, swears, and smokes. Robert realizes that being macho is a rather superficial concern and that there is little glory in being a macho man since most of them die young. In spite of all his pain, Robert is ultimately someone who is geared toward survival.*)
4. Why do you think Manny decides to cross the Rio Grande in Juárez instead of following the river up a few miles and crossing where the border patrol are not likely to be? (*Answers will vary. Manny is afraid of being alone and exposed. In Juárez there are places to hide along the border, so he feels safer. Also, other people will be crossing at the same time and there is safety in numbers.*)
5. Why are some of the people along the border a greater concern to Manny than the United States Border Patrol? (*Though the border patrol “could be mean if they wanted to be” [p. 36], they have strict laws about how illegal immigrants are handled and will protect the life of the immigrant while in custody. The vultures and coyotes in Mexico capture people to kill, sell, or exploit them in some way. They have no interest in keeping anyone safe.*)
6. Why do you think the border patrol changes the way it works the border each night? (*If the border patrol never changed its tactics, illegal immigrants would eventually devise a plan to cross the border in a less heavily guarded area. By changing their tactics each night, the border patrol can keep potential illegal immigrants guessing.*)
7. Why do you think Manny chooses not to speak when he is caught by the four thugs? (*He knows it will do him no good to answer the questions, so he concentrates all his effort on looking for a way he can escape.*)

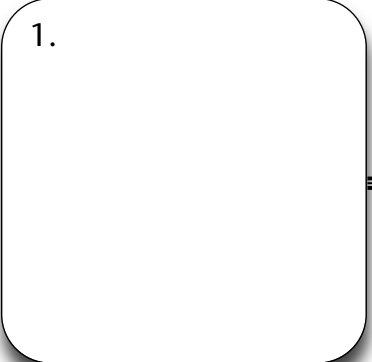
8. Who or what is a “Night Animal”? *(This is what Manny calls himself whenever he needs to do something stealthily and bravely in the interest of his survival. When Manny is a Night Animal, he is not afraid and relies more on his instincts.)*
9. Why does Paulsen say that the sergeant becomes “some other sergeant...the sergeant in the mirror” (p. 50) when he begins making his way down the street with Manny? *(Robert’s welfare is threatened when Manny tries to steal from him. Robert switches to survival mode, the man in the mirror. The change from the broken man vomiting behind the bar to the business-like military man dragging away a prisoner is immediate and striking.)*
10. Why does Robert think it is better not to know the names of the men he trains? *(If something tragic happens to these men later on, they will not be friends of his who will haunt him when he is sober.)*
11. Why does no one stop the sergeant as he drags Manny through the streets of Juárez? *(He is in uniform and looks authoritative. The man in the mirror commands respect.)*
12. Why do Manny and Robert both decide to lie to the policeman? *(Manny is angry that the sergeant will not release him and is worried that the sergeant will mention his attempted wallet theft. Manny wants to shift attention away from himself and escape, and he thinks that accusing Robert of indecency is the best way to do this. Robert lies because he feels sorry for Manny and does not want Manny to get in trouble.)*

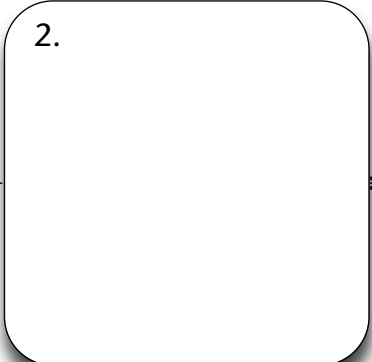
Supplementary Activities

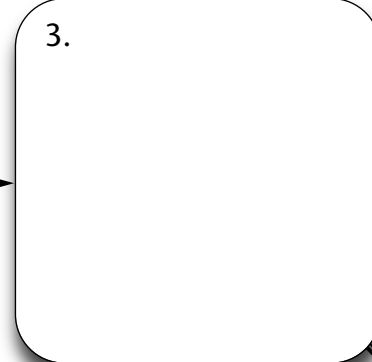
1. Geography/History: Locate and highlight Juárez, the Rio Grande River, and El Paso on a map. Then, using online resources, write a brief history of the United States Border Patrol.
2. Creative Writing: Manny has few desires in the world. What do you desire right now? Write a paragraph describing Manny’s circumstances and his desires. Then write a paragraph describing your circumstances and desires.

Sequencing Events

Directions: In the boxes below, illustrate main events throughout the story in the order they occurred. Write an explanation for each illustration on the corresponding line below the boxes.

1. 

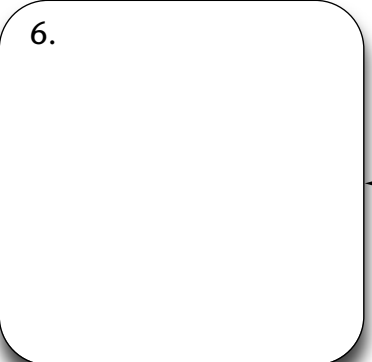
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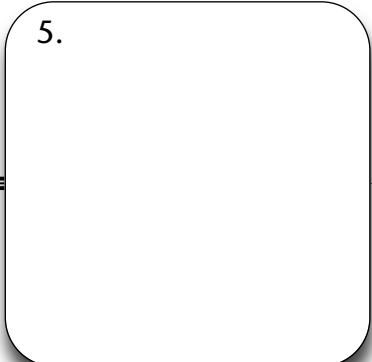
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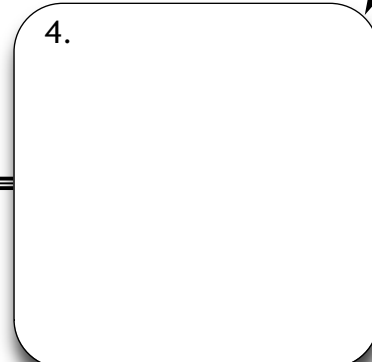
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