

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Bridge of San Luis Rey

by Thornton Wilder

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Item No. 201344

The Bridge of San Luis Rey

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define allusion and explain three examples from the novel.
2. define irony and explain the irony of Brother Juniper's fate.
3. define simile and discuss two examples from the novel.
4. define imagery and explain one example from the novel.
5. present evidence that clouds are used as symbols of hope.
6. define Brother Juniper's mission in writing the book and discuss whether he succeeds.
7. define Doña María's mission.
8. identify Madre María's character flaw.
9. explain the reasons why Esteban cannot live without Manuel.
10. identify the importance of love as it applies to the five characters that die when the bridge collapses.
11. discuss the changes that the following characters undergo as a result of the catastrophe:
 - Madre María
 - Camila
 - Doña María
12. identify the source of Pepita's pain and confusion.
13. discuss the importance the following characters place on literature and art:
 - Doña María
 - Camila
 - Uncle Pio
 - the Archbishop

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Why does Brother Juniper set about discovering the lives of the five who die when the bridge collapses?
2. Explain the role of the Church throughout the novel. Include the varying relationships that the following characters have with the Church:
 - Madre María
 - Doña María
 - the Archbishop
 - Brother Juniper
3. What does the narrator mean when he states, "...isn't it possible that even I have missed the very spring with in the spring"?
4. Discuss the theme of solitude. Which characters live in solitude? Why do they choose this life, if it is a choice? How is the life of solitude unique to each character?
5. Through his characters, Wilder makes social commentary regarding the role of women. Discuss how he accomplishes this through the opinions and the experiences of Madre María, Pepita, Camila, and Doña Clara.
6. Wilder also makes social commentary regarding the failings of power and prestige. Discuss how the following characters exemplify the problems of power:
 - the Archbishop
 - Don Andrés
 - Camila
7. In this novel, clouds often appear over the water during times of great pensiveness and/or sorrow. Support the theme of clouds as symbols of hope.
8. Discuss the theme of love in the novel. Who loves? How do they love differently? Why do they love? What do they receive in return? What is the purpose of love?
9. Brother Juniper sets out to prove that we live and die by the plan of a supreme being, not by accident. Does he succeed? Consider both the static characters and the events that occur after his death.
10. Does Camila ever truly love? Support your answer with details from the novel.

The Bridge of San Luis Rey

All page references and quotations come from the Harper Collins edition of *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, copyright 1998.

Part One: Perhaps an Accident

Vocabulary

- declaimed** – proclaimed with fervor
- gesticulating** – gesturing with the arms
- harangued** – scolded bitterly
- Inquisition** – the Spanish Inquisition, during which inquisitors, or investigators, sought out, tried, and sentenced those guilty of heresy and/or sorcery. Countless people were suspected and tried, and thousands were executed.
- rent** – a tear
- savants** – wise people; geniuses
- signed** – made the sign of the cross
- surprise** – uncover
- usurers** – loan sharks
- usury** – lending money at high interest rates

1. Describe the bridge of San Luis Rey.

2. The deaths of the five people crossing the bridge greatly affect the people of Peru. What changes does this event generate?

3. Why is it surprising that the bridge disaster has such a profound effect on the people of Peru?

16. What virtues does Uncle Pio represent? Explain.

17. What virtue does Don Jaime represent? Explain.

Part Five: Perhaps an Intention

Vocabulary

autos sacramentales – historical and religious plays performed during a festival
dies irae – day of wrath
sub specie aeternitatis – in eternity

1. Explain the allusion in the following passage:

“ ‘My cousin lives by the bridge of San Luis Rey,’ says another, and a smile goes around the company, for that also means: under the sword of Damocles.”

2. When Brother Juniper tabulates the statistics for the victims and the survivors of the pestilence in Puerto, what does he discover?

3. Describe Brother Juniper’s method of finding the meaning behind the deaths of the five on the bridge. What conclusion does he draw? Is his conclusion accurate? Explain.

4. What happens to Brother Juniper and his book? Explain the irony.
