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Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Parrot in the Oven:
Mi Vida

by Victor Martinez

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Objectives

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

1. discuss the significance of the title.
2. define vocabulary words from the text.
3. point out instances of the author's use of mood.
4. cite incidents from the story to discuss the following themes:
 - A person must maintain faith and hope that a better life is possible.
 - Racism exists in this country in many different forms and between many different groups of people.
 - Racial oppression creates a feeling of hopelessness in those who are oppressed, which can result in social problems such as violence, drinking, unplanned pregnancies, and child abuse.
5. relate significant details from the story about the hardships of Manny's everyday life growing up as a poor Mexican-American.
6. identify recurring images or motifs in the story.
7. discuss the following as possible symbols in the story: Mom's glass animals, grandfather's cherry tree, and grandmother's garden.
8. cite incidents from the story to illustrate that this is a coming-of-age story for Manny.
9. point out instances of the author's creative metaphors, similes, and descriptive imagery and discuss how these devices help add interest and meaning to the story.
10. recognize that each chapter in the novel is a vignette that relates one aspect of Manny's life and discuss the life lesson Manny learns from each vignette.
11. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the following lessons about life:
 - Too much pride can be harmful for a person.
 - A person cannot make friends by exerting power over others.
12. contrast Mr. Hernandez's goals for his children with those of Mrs. Hernandez.
13. cite incidents from the story that define courage.
14. write a character sketch of Nardo discussing the extent to which he is like his father.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Turn to the table of contents in the story. Each chapter in this novel is a vignette which describes some aspect of Manny's life. For each chapter title, discuss what Manny learns about himself, or about life in general, from the experience he describes. For example: In the first chapter, "The Baseball Glove," Manny experiences the unfair labor practices endured by many Mexican-Americans. He learns that he does not want to pick chili peppers for his living when he grows up.
2. Relate the story of the parrot in the oven. Why do you think Dad compares Manny to the parrot? In your opinion, is Dad's comparison accurate? Is Manny still like a parrot in an oven by the end of the story?
3. Cite two incidents from the text which illustrate the following theme. Racism exists in this country in many different forms and between many different groups of people.
4. Relate three hardships Manny suffers growing up as a poor Mexican-American. For example, Manny does not have nice shoes.
5. Discuss the meaning of the following recurring motifs or images from the story.
 - milk
 - Dad says his children are "pennies"
6. Cite incidents from the story to illustrate the following statement about life.
 - Too much pride can be harmful for a person.
 - A person cannot make friends by exerting power over others.
7. Consider the following religious symbols in the story and discuss how each symbol illustrates the theme that a person must maintain faith and hope for a happy future.
 - the picture of the Last Supper
 - the image of Dad carrying Magda to the bath to cool her fever
 - Manny's vision of heaven for grandma
8. Which of Manny's parents exerts the greater influence on his life? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.
9. In what ways do the following minor characters help Manny on his path to maturity? Nardo, Lencho, Eddie, Dorothy

Parrot in the Oven: mi vida

Chapter 1 – The Baseball Glove

VOCABULARY

cordon – a line or circle of police or soldiers, stationed around an area
furrow – a narrow groove made in the ground by a plow
hibernation – spending the winter in a dormant state
Immigration – a department of the United States Government responsible for apprehending illegal aliens working in the United States
wetback – a derogatory term for an immigrant who enters the U.S. illegally from Mexico

1. In this chapter, the narrator describes his brother Bernardo (Nardo). List three character traits for Nardo. Based on the tone of the text, how does the narrator feel about his brother? Identify a use of hyperbole on the first page.

2. Why does Nardo refuse to get and keep a job despite pressure from his parents to find work?

3. Before writing fiction, Victor Martinez made his living writing short stories and poetry. Many critics praise this novel because of Martinez's interesting and poetic use of figurative language. In the following passage, the narrator describes his father. Find two examples of figurative language in the selection.

This thing was, my dad wasn't working either. He'd just lost his job as a translator for the city because he'd drink beer during lunch and slur his words. Ever since losing his job, and even before, really, Dad had about as much patience as you could prop on a toothpick. He was always zeroing in on things he wanted to be disappointed in, and when he found one, he'd loose a curse quicker than an eyeblink. Even when he wasn't cursing, you could still feel one simmering there under his lip, ready to boil over.

- 7. In the first two chapters, Manny is a young fourteen-year-old boy who does not have a clear understanding of the world around him. For example, he “wondered why he [Dad] got so tossed around by things, why he’d roughen his voice and tire himself out complaining.”

What other evidence is there in this chapter that Manny is having trouble understanding or coping with the world around him?

- 8. Cite an incident from this chapter to prove the following statement. Dad, like Manny, does not understand how to break out of the cycle of oppression faced by some Mexican-Americans.

Chapter 8 – Family Affair

VOCABULARY

amoeba – a one-celled microscopic organism found in soil or water
menthol – a white, pungent, waxy crystalline alcohol

1. Racism is one of the themes of this story. Cite two examples of racism in this chapter.

2. Why does Mom hit Manny? How does Manny respond to her abuse?

3. Martinez uses many interesting similes in this chapter. In the following simile, Dad is described as he carries Magda to the tub of water. In what sense might this simile also be a symbol to religion? What do you think Martinez is suggesting about Magda with this simile?

“Like an ant carrying a giant statue of bread, Dad carried Magda out of the room...In the bathroom, Dad put Magda, nightgown and all, inside the tub and bobbed her steady.”
