

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Bronze Bow

by

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Book Information

Elizabeth George Speare, The Bronze Bow

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Eighteen-year-old Daniel, an Israeli, is consumed by hatred of the Romans who killed his father, until he learns from listening to Jesus that love is the answer.

Award: Newbery Medal

Topics: Countries/Regions, Israel

Main Characters

Daniel bar Jamin an angry young Jewish man who hopes to avenge the destruction of his family by driving the Romans out of his land; he learns to let go of his hate when it almost costs him the life of his sister

Jesus of Nazareth a gentle leader who encourages Daniel to let go of his hatred; he cures Leah

Joel bar Hezron the scholarly son of a wealthy man; he joins Daniel in a vow to fight the Romans but is later captured by the Romans while he is spying for Rosh

Joktan the scrawny young boy who leaves Rosh's band and aligns himself with Daniel when Rosh refuses to help Daniel save Joel

Leah Daniel's traumatized sister, who refuses to leave the house for fear of encountering strangers; she almost dies after Daniel rebukes her for forming a friendship with a Roman soldier

Malthace (Thacia or Thace) Joel's strong-minded and independent twin sister, who vows to help Daniel and Joel fight the Romans; she befriends Leah and falls in love with Daniel

Marcus a German man who has been forced to become part of the Roman army; he forms a friendship with Leah because she reminds him of his own sister

Nathan one of Daniel's followers who is killed helping rescue Joel

Rosh a bandit who lives in the mountains above Daniel's village; he claims to be preparing for the overthrow of the Romans, but he frequently robs the Jewish villagers

Samson a massive man who is rescued from the galleys by Rosh but prefers the company of Daniel; he is killed when he saves Daniel from a legion of Roman soldiers

Simon the Zealot a blacksmith who asks Daniel to run his shop while he goes to follow Jesus; he tries to help Daniel live a happier life

Vocabulary

clamor a lot of noise, often from many people speaking loudly

cower to cringe or hide

disciples followers of a person or school of thought

flout to openly show contempt or scorn

inveigle to coax or manipulate someone into doing something

litter a curtained platform carried by people to transport a person

recompense reward or payment

Synopsis

Daniel is a former apprentice who ran away from a cruel master blacksmith and is now living on a mountain with a man named Rosh. Rosh claims to be raising an army to free Israel from the Romans. One day Daniel meets Joel and his twin sister Malthace, or Thacia for short, who are visiting the mountain. He remembers Joel from the synagogue school and is happy to have someone close to his own age with whom to speak. Daniel and Joel assist Rosh in rescuing a huge man named Samson from being sent to the galleys. Daniel earns the silent Samson's friendship by removing his shackles.

Some time later Daniel is visited by Simon, a fellow blacksmith. Simon says that Daniel's former owner, Amalek, has died, and Daniel is now free. Simon persuades Daniel to go see his grandmother and

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sister Leah in the village, but Daniel feels trapped there and overwhelmed by responsibility. Simon also takes Daniel to hear Jesus speak, but Daniel is disappointed by Jesus' pacifism. He goes back to the mountain to nurse his hatred of the Romans.

Restless because of his desire to fight the Romans and also because of thinking about his sister and grandmother's poor living conditions, Daniel goes to Capernaum to find Joel. He needs a friend with whom he can share his feelings. Daniel again sees Jesus, who is speaking to a crowd, but he is troubled when Jesus does not condemn the presence of Roman soldiers. Daniel travels on to Joel's house, but he gets banned from the house when he loses his temper and argues with Joel's father during dinner.

On his way home, Daniel insults a Roman soldier and is badly injured while he is running away. Desperate for help, he returns to Joel's house, where Thacia tends to his wounds. When he is feeling better, Daniel explains to the twins that he hates the Romans because they killed his father, causing his mother to die from grief and his sister to be possessed by a demon of fear of strangers. The three take a vow to fight for God's Victory.

Later that night Daniel decides to sneak away to his mountain. A week after Daniel returns, Rosh orders him to repair his favorite dagger. Daniel needs parts from Simon, but Simon is not in his shop in the village. Remembering that Simon spoke of wanting to follow Jesus, Daniel travels to Capernaum to find Simon. Daniel enlists Joel's help in the search. They finally find Simon in the house where Jesus is about to dine, and Joel and Daniel join the meal. After the meal, they watch Jesus heal the sick, but Daniel is skeptical.

When Daniel returns, Rosh tells him to rob a miser traveling through the mountains. Daniel returns with the money but has not killed the man. Rosh complains that Daniel has a soft streak.

In August, Simon sends a message that Daniel's grandmother is dying. Daniel goes home in time to

be with his grandmother a short time before she dies. He is then forced to stay to take care of Leah. Simon persuades Daniel to take over his blacksmith shop and move into his house with Leah. In order to keep peace in the village, Daniel reluctantly agrees to service the Romans who come to the shop.

Since Leah is greatly disturbed by strangers, Daniel is doubly angry when a Roman soldier looks through the door at Leah while he is visiting the shop. Soon afterward Daniel enlists a boy named Nathan to be part of his war against the Romans. Joel brings another recruit, and soon Daniel has a secret society of about twenty boys. The Roman soldier who saw Leah starts prowling around the shop, so Daniel feels he must move the secret meetings further from the village. After one meeting, Daniel returns to find Thacia has befriended Leah. Daniel is shocked; Leah usually fears strangers. After this, Leah starts to improve.

One day Rosh tells Daniel to have Joel find out when some wealthy men are going to be attending a party. Thacia disguises herself as Joel to fool the Romans while Joel works as a spy. When Daniel finds out Rosh used the information to rob the houses of the wealthy Jewish men, he is disappointed and a little disillusioned.

Some time later, the Romans capture Joel. When Daniel asks Rosh to help rescue Joel, Rosh refuses, saying Joel was stupid to get caught. Disgusted, Daniel organizes his own rescue party using his inexperienced recruits. They ambush the legion transporting Joel, but the plan almost fails until Samson unexpectedly appears and throws Daniel and Joel out of harm's way. Samson is mortally wounded and captured. Nathan is also killed.

Racked with guilt over the deaths of his friends, Daniel tries to bury himself in work. When Joel comes to visit, Daniel tells him he is no longer a follower of Rosh. Joel also asks Daniel to warn Jesus that the elders of the synagogue are angry with Jesus. When Daniel goes to warn Jesus, he feels compelled to speak to Jesus in person. He tells Jesus of his guilt over Samson's death, and

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Jesus tells him he must give up his hate.

Soon afterward, Daniel goes to see Thacia dance in a festival. When Thacia attempts to confess her love for him, Daniel insists that his life is dedicated to fighting the Romans.

Upon returning home, Daniel discovers Leah has befriended Marcus, the Roman soldier who peeked at her through the door. Enraged, Daniel agrees not to kill Marcus only if Leah vows never to see him again. Frightened, Leah promises but then regresses to her former self. She barely eats, and when Daniel enters the room, she cowers. She becomes deathly ill, but Daniel still refuses to allow her to see Marcus. He finally sends for Thacia, thinking she might want to visit before Leah dies.

When Thacia finally comes, she brings Jesus with her. Leah is cured, and Daniel finally lets go of his hate. As Jesus is walking away, Daniel invites Marcus into his house.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

What does Daniel do to win the friendship of Samson?

Daniel does several things to win Samson's friendship. What seems to be most significant to Samson is that Daniel removes his shackles, but Daniel's other kind acts also add to Samson's gratitude. Daniel is the only one to offer to lead Samson up the mountain to safety after Rosh's men rescue Samson from the tradesmen. Daniel shares his own water with Samson while they are working. He gives Samson food and a cloak to cover himself when he sleeps. Daniel also has more faith in Samson's intelligence than many of Rosh's men, and Daniel tries to stop the other men from playing tricks on Samson. Also, he talks to Samson about his ideas and feelings even though he has no idea if Samson can understand him. Moreover, Samson seems to sense that Daniel wants to protect him when Daniel prevents Samson from following him down the mountain.

Literary Analysis

What does the bronze bow symbolize, or represent, to Daniel?

At first the bronze bow is used as a sign to show that Daniel is waiting in the passageway at Joel's house. Daniel, Joel, and Thacia choose the bronze bow because it represents Daniel's vow to fight for God's Victory, which Daniel interprets to mean destroying the Romans. The bronze bow also comes to stand for those who are willing to share Daniel's mission with him, such as Thacia, Joel, and Nathan. By the end of the story, though, the bronze bow has taken on a new meaning. Instead of the bronze bow representing the military triumph of the Jewish people over the Romans, Daniel begins to see it as God's triumph of love over hatred among all peoples. Thus, Daniel originally agrees with Thacia when she suggests that the man who draws the bronze bow must be physically empowered by God, as David had been when he fought Goliath and later led the army of Israel. However, Daniel finally concludes that the power to draw the bronze bow must come from love.

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Inferential Comprehension

How are Leah and Thacia both different and alike?

Leah is frightened and timid and is often intimidated by her brother. She was raised by a poverty-stricken grandmother after most of her family was destroyed. On the other hand, Thacia is self-confident and brave. She has an excellent relationship with her brother and was raised in a stable, loving family. Despite these differences, Leah and Thacia become good friends, since both girls seek the approval of their brothers and have a mutual love for Daniel.

Constructing Meaning

Daniel is committed to following Rosh's leadership throughout most of this story. How did you feel about his decision to part ways with Rosh?

Answers will vary depending on the reader. Daniel's love of Rosh as a leader and a father figure contributes to a sense of loss when Rosh does not live up to Daniel's expectations. However, by the time Daniel parts with Rosh, it is obvious that Rosh does not care about his men. At this point, the relationship is destructive for Daniel and those he loves. His decision to break with Rosh probably comes as a relief even though it is clear that this is a painful event for Daniel.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The terrain Daniel lives in often affects the events in this story. Have the students draw a picture of an event in which geographical features of the countryside are used to the advantage of the characters in this story. For example, Daniel knows the mountains of Arbela will be a good place to ambush the Roman legion, and Jesus uses the fish market because it is ideal for talking to the people without disturbing the local businessmen.

Comparing and Contrasting While both Rosh and Jesus become leaders of large groups of people, they have very different approaches to providing leadership. Have the students write a short paper explaining the differences and

similarities between the two leaders.

Understanding the Author's Craft Daniel's perspective on the events in this story seems to be markedly different from the way characters such as Leah, Simon, or Rosh might describe what happens. Have the students choose a character other than Daniel and rewrite one of the events in this story from the perspective of their chosen character.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning Daniel remembers bits of poems to inspire him in his fight to help his people and avenge his family. Have the students write their own poem describing Daniel's story. Have them attempt to use metaphors from the text in their poems.