

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for I, Juan de Pareja by

Elizabeth Borton de Treviño

Book Information

Elizabeth Borton de Treviño, I, Juan de Pareja

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Interest Level: MG

After the slave Juan de Pareja is willed to the great Spanish painter Velázquez, their relationship changes from one of master and slave to one of friendship.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; Newbery Medal

Topics: Arts, Painting; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; People, Slaves; Power Lessons
AR, Grade 6

Main Characters

Bartolomé Murillo an apprentice of Master who becomes friends with Juanico; he persuades Juanico to go to confession

Brother Isidro a poor Franciscan monk who helps Juanico after Juanico's first mistress dies

Carmelo the cruel gypsy muleteer who contracts to deliver Juanico to his new master in Madrid

Don Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez (Master) Juanico's master; he is one of the great European painters of the seventeenth century

Doña Juana de Miranda (Mistress) the wife of Master; she is the daughter of the famous artist Pacheco

Francisca (Paquita) Master's eldest daughter; she dies giving birth to her second child

Ignacia Master's youngest daughter; she dies while Master and Juanico are in Italy

Juan Bautista an apprentice who serves Master; he falls in love with Paquita and marries her

Juan de Pareja (Juanico) the main character and narrator of the story; while a slave, he learns to paint by watching his master

King Philip IV the King of Spain; he becomes friends with Master

Lolis a slave sold to Mistress Velázquez; Lolis marries Juanico

Miri Juanico's first love; she is a slave of the painter Rubens

Peter Paul Rubens a famous European artist; he comes to visit Master

Vocabulary

apprentice one who learns by working for a skilled craftsman

despondency depression, sadness

galleon a heavy sailing ship

taciturn quiet, inexpressive

temerity boldness, overconfidence

vermilion a bright red color

Synopsis

Nine-year-old Juan de Pareja is a slave in an aristocratic household in seventeenth century Seville, Spain. His mistress teaches him the alphabet, and he soon learns to read and write. When his owners die suddenly, Juan is bequeathed to his mistress's nephew in Madrid, Diego Velázquez, a well-known painter. After a long journey under the control of a cruel gypsy muleteer, Juan arrives at his new owner's home. Juan's sole duty is to serve his master in his painting. Juanico, as he is fondly called by Master, is to clean brushes, mix colors, prepare canvasses and frames, and constantly arrange the curtains in the room to maintain steady light on the model. When Juanico says he would like to learn to paint, Master tells him that Spanish law forbids slaves from practicing any of the arts. Although he is disappointed, Juanico is grateful to belong to such a kind and affectionate Master.

As Juanico grows to a young man, his master's painting becomes more famous. Master becomes the artist for the King of Spain and moves into the castle. The King soon begins to trust that Master is his friend and not merely looking for personal favors and gains, and they grow fond of each other. Apprentices come and go over the years, and Master teaches them well.

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One day, the King gives Master a commission to go to Italy to study the great works of art in that country. Master leaves his family and travels with Juanico. During their stay in Italy, Juanico secretly begins to draw charcoal sketches. When they return to Spain, they discover that Master's youngest daughter has recently died.

About fourteen years after the trip to Italy, a young apprentice, Juan Bautista, comes to study with Master. He falls in love with Master's remaining daughter, Paquita. With Juanico's help, Juan and Paquita are allowed to marry. Master paints a symbol of their love, a small red flower, into a portrait of Paquita.

After spending years watching and learning from his master, Juanico begins pilfering some colors from Master and secretly tries painting. After much practice, he boldly paints a Negro Virgin Mary. He shows his friend, the apprentice Bartolomé, who congratulates him on a fine painting. Juanico becomes distraught, however, about deceiving his kind master, and Bartolomé urges Juanico to confess his sins to God but not to tell Master until the time seems right.

Several years later, the King again commissions Master to go to Italy, this time to collect art for Spain's museums and for the palace. Juanico again accompanies Master on the trip. Master badly injures his hand while in the galleon on the rough seas, but Juanico is able to nurse it back to health. When Master is invited to paint the Pope but has no other commissions, Juanico secretly shows the noblemen of Italy an example of how well his master paints. Master then receives many commissions to paint, and his self-confidence returns after the injury to his hand.

After spending about a year in Italy, Master and Juanico return to Madrid. During their absence, Mistress has acquired a new female slave, Lolis, and Juanico is quickly enchanted by her. Juanico plans to ask Master to give him Lolis for his wife, but he is still worried about revealing his own painting.

Juanico has secretly been painting a scene of hounds, which he places in a display of Master's paintings. One day, when the King comes to the studio to see Master's work, he notices and admires the painting of the hounds. Juanico confesses that he has been working secretly for years and that the painting is his. Master immediately writes a letter granting Juanico his freedom, thus making his painting legal. When Juanico asks for the hand of Lolis, Lolis refuses, saying she does not want any children born into slavery. Mistress immediately grants Lolis her freedom also. Thus freed, Juanico and Lolis are wed.

Hard times quickly follow. Mistress becomes quite ill; Paquita dies giving birth to her second child; and Mistress dies soon after Paquita's death. To stem his grief, Master immerses himself in his most recent commission: preparing for the marriage of the King's sister. Master becomes ill shortly after the wedding, though. For twenty-one days, Juanico and the doctor try all they can to nurse Master back to health. On a day when Master seems to be getting better, Juanico escorts him to the studio. As Master approaches his favorite easel, he collapses and dies. After a quiet funeral, Juanico and Lolis decide to return to Seville. When Juanico asks the King's permission to leave, the King realizes that he should have named Master a Knight of Santiago long before he died. With Juanico's skilled hand guiding his own, the King paints the Cross of Santiago on Master's breast on "Las Meninas," the only self-portrait of Master.

Open-Ended Questions

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

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Initial Understanding

Why does Juanico dislike being called Juanico by anyone other than Master?

When Juanico lives with his first mistress, he thinks that she often treats him in the same manner that she treats her dog. She may suddenly slap him without warning one minute and fondly stroke him the next minute. However, when Juanico is hiding in the boxes and household gear in a patio, Master calls his name affectionately. Through Master's kind treatment, Juanico soon enjoys hearing Master call him Juanico. When people other than Master or family members call him by that name, though, Juanico thinks they are treating him carelessly, as they might treat a dog. The only character in the story who does not call him Juanico is his friend, Bartolomé. In fact, Bartolomé first calls him "Señor" Pareja, an address never used for slaves.

Literary Analysis

Why does the King become such good friends with Master?

The King has the enormous responsibility of ruling over his country. This means that many times he must do things that displease some of his subjects. As King, he must also always appear stately and in control. With Master, the King gradually is able to sit quietly without any pretentious airs. Through the years, the two men develop a deep sense of mutual trust. As they sit quietly in each other's company, the two men share their love of art and the honesty reflected in Master's work.

Inferential Comprehension

Juanico and Master have a deep sense of respect for one another. Why, then, does Juanico not tell Master that he is painting?

Juanico is confident of his Master's affection, but by confessing that he is doing something illegal, Juanico would be putting Master in the difficult position of overlooking an illegal activity, forbidding Juanico to continue, or turning Juanico over to the legal authorities. Juanico admires his Master dearly and does not want to put him in that position. Once Juanico's painting is revealed in the presence of the King, Master quickly comes to the realization that no law will be broken if Juanico is not a slave. He, thus, quickly gives Juanico his freedom.

Constructing Meaning

Master tells his apprentice Cristobal, "Art should be Truth; and Truth unadorned, unsentimentalized, is Beauty." What does he mean by "Truth"?

Master studies his subjects in a seemingly detached and unemotional way, but he says he feels strong emotion. Each painting that he creates reflects the feelings and soul of the subject, not the artist. For Master, any of his own emotion included in a painting would result in hiding the truth. His job, as he sees it, is to convey in his work exactly what he sees in his subjects. In fact, when his apprentice's painting includes an ugly roach, Master praises the work saying that the picture is honest and full of truth.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Don Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez became a very well-known artist in seventeenth-century Europe. Many of his paintings can be found in museums around the world. Have the students use the library, local art museums, or the Internet to do research on the life and times of Velázquez or another artist of the seventeenth century. Have them also study samples of the artist's works, paying attention to detail. Each student should then prepare a written report on the artist.

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Recognizing Setting Juanico and Master travel to Rome, where Master meets the Pope. Have the students do research on Rome and the Vatican and prepare a poster describing things that Juanico and Master may have seen. The posters can be displayed in the room for viewing.

Extending Meaning In the last chapter of the book, the author discloses that she constructed the story based on information that she found through her research and by studying the paintings of Velázquez. Have the students work in groups to create a short story about a well-known person who is no longer living. The writing should be fictionalized but based on some facts that the students are able to discover. The stories or plays can be presented or enacted for the class.

Responding to Literature Juanico's only job is to help his master in his work. He helps prepare paints, frames, and canvasses. Invite an art teacher to come to the class to demonstrate the medium of oil painting. The art teacher should bring samples of paints, frames, and canvasses. After the presentation, the students can work together to create a collage of their work on a canvas. For example, each student could try to paint one object on the canvas to give the feeling of painting with oil paint. Discussion should focus on the talents of the great artists.