



Before You Read

The Boar Hunt

Reading Focus

Have you ever had an experience that completely changed your attitude toward something? Perhaps you were injured while playing a dangerous sport, and you vowed never to play that sport again.

Journal Write about an experience that completely changed your attitude toward something. Explain how your outlook changed.

Setting a Purpose Read to learn what changes a hunter's attitude toward his sport.

Building Background



The Time and Place

"The Boar Hunt" takes place in the not-too-distant past, in a remote, unexplored jungle in Peru.

Did You Know?

Wild boars are wild hogs with razor-sharp tusks, pointy ears, straight tails, and a hard, thick hide covering their chests. They weigh an average of 200 pounds, although some may weigh as much as 500 pounds. Wild boars run much faster than domestic hogs and are

naturally aggressive toward other creatures, including humans. The prospect of bagging a wild boar—despite the danger, or perhaps because of it—has challenged hunters since ancient times.

Vocabulary Preview

- rejuvenate** (ri jōō' vā nāt') *v.* to make fresh or young again; p. 158
lethargy (leth' ər jē) *n.* sluggish inactivity or drowsiness; p. 159
impotent (im' pət ənt) *adj.* ineffective, powerless, or helpless; p. 160
horde (hōrd) *n.* a large group; multitude; p. 160
tenaciously (ti nā' shəs lē) *adv.* stubbornly; persistently; p. 160
sporadic (spə rad' ik) *adj.* irregular; occasional; p. 160
atonement (ə tōn' mənt) *n.* something done to make up for a sin, injury, or loss; p. 163
implicit (im plis' it) *adj.* suggested but not directly stated; p. 163
infamy (in' fə mē) *n.* extreme wickedness or shameful evil; p. 163



Meet


José Vasconcelos

In 1908, a year after he had graduated from law school, José Vasconcelos (hō sã' vās cōn sã' lōs) joined the revolutionary movement that led to the eventual resignation of Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz. A prolific writer, philosopher, politician, educational reformer, and university president, Vasconcelos helped Mexicans discover a cultural identity that stressed the dignity and nobility of their Indian heritage. His belief in the superiority of Mexican culture helped to awaken a spirit of national pride.

José Vasconcelos was born in Oaxaca, Mexico, in 1882. He died in 1959. A Mexican Ulysses is an abridged translation of Vasconcelos's autobiography.



The Boar Hunt

José Vasconcelos 
Translated by Paul Waldorf

WE WERE FOUR COMPANIONS, and we went by the names of our respective nationalities: the Colombian, the Peruvian, the Mexican; the fourth, a native of Ecuador, was called Quito¹ for short. Unforeseen chance had joined us together a few years ago on a large sugar plantation on the Peruvian coast.

We worked at different occupations during the day and met during the evening in our off time. Not being Englishmen, we did not play cards. Instead, our constant discussions led to disputes. These didn't stop us from wanting to see each other the next night, however, to continue the interrupted debates and support

them with new arguments. Nor did the rough sentences of the preceding wrangles indicate a lessening of our affection, of which we assured ourselves reciprocally with the clasping of hands and a look. On Sundays we used to go on hunting parties. We roamed the fertile glens, stalking, generally with poor results, the game of the warm region around the coast, or we entertained ourselves killing birds that flew in the sunlight during the siesta hour.

1. Perhaps he was called this because *Quito* (kē' tō) is the capital of Ecuador.

The Boar Hunt

We came to be tireless wanderers and excellent marksmen. Whenever we climbed a hill and gazed at the imposing range of mountains in the interior, its attractiveness stirred us and we wanted to climb it. What attracted us more was the trans-Andean² region: fertile plateaus extending on the other side of the range in the direction of the Atlantic toward the immense land of Brazil. It was as if primitive nature called us to her breast. The vigor of the fertile, untouched jungles promised to rejuvenate our minds, the same vigor which rejuvenates the strength and the thickness of the trees each year. At times we devised crazy plans. As with all things that are given a lot of thought, these schemes generally materialized. Ultimately nature and events are largely what our imaginations make them out to be. And so we went ahead planning and acting. At the end of the year, with arranged vacations, accumulated money, good rifles, abundant munitions, stone- and mudproof boots, four hammocks, and a half dozen faithful Indians, our caravan descended the Andean slopes, leading to the endless green ocean.



Did You Know?

The *Marañón* (mä' rä nyōn') River runs through northeast Peru and flows into the Amazon.

At last we came upon a village at the edge of the Marañón River. Here we changed our safari. The region we were going to penetrate had no roads. It was unexplored underbrush into which we could enter only by going down the

river in a canoe. In time we came to where we proposed to carry out the our journey, the hunting of wild boar.

We had been informed that boar herds of several thousands, occupying region, eating grass and staying together, exploiting the grazing areas, organized like an army. They are very easy to attack when they are scattered, satisfying their appetites—an army given the delights of victory. When they are about hungry, on the other hand, they are usually vicious. In our search we glided down the river between imposing jungles with the visions and the company of three faithful Indian oarsmen.

One morning we stopped at some place near the river. Thanks to the information gathered there, we decided to disembark a little farther on in order to spend the night on the land and continue the hunt for the boar in the thicket the following day.

Sheltered in a backwater, we camped and after a short exploration found a place in which to make camp. We unloaded the provisions and the rifles, tied them up securely, then with the help of the Indians we set up our camp one half kilometer from the river bank. In marking the path to the land we were careful not to lose ourselves in the thickets. The Indians withdrew toward their huts, promising to return two days later. At dawn we would set out in search of the boar.

Though night had scarcely come, the heat was great, we gathered at the fire, looking at each other's faces, to look for instinctive protection. We talked a little, smoked, confessed to being tired, and decided to go to bed. Each hammock had been tied by one end to a single tree, firm though not thick in the trunk. Stretching out from

2. The prefix *trans-* means "across, through, or over." Here, *trans-Andean* refers to the Andes Mountains.

Vocabulary

rejuvenate (ri jōō' və nāt') *v.* to make fresh or young again



Selva, 1981. Luis Monje. Oil on canvas, 51½ x 67 in. Private collection.

Viewing the painting: What elements of this painting reflect the sense of foreboding in the story?

axis in different directions, the hammocks were supported by the other end on other trunks. Each of us carried his rifle, cartridges, and some provisions which couldn't remain exposed on the ground. The sight of the weapons made us consider the place where we were, surrounded by the unknown. A slight feeling of terror made us laugh, cough, and talk. But fatigue overcame us, that heavy fatigue which compels the soldier to scorn danger, to put down his rifle, and to fall

asleep though the most persistent enemy pursues him. We scarcely noticed the supreme grandeur of that remote tropical night.

I don't know whether it was the light of the magnificent dawn or the strange noises which awakened me and made me sit up in my hammock and look carefully at my surroundings. I saw nothing but the awakening of that life which at night falls into the lethargy of the jungle. I called my sleeping companions and, alert and seated in our hanging beds, we

Vocabulary

lethargy (leth' ər jē) *n.* sluggish inactivity or drowsiness

The Boar Hunt

dressed ourselves. We were preparing to jump to the ground when we clearly heard a somewhat distant, sudden sound of rustling branches. Since it did not continue, however, we descended confidently, washed our faces with water from our canteens, and slowly prepared and enjoyed breakfast. By about 11:00 in the morning we were armed and bold and preparing to make our way through the jungle.

But then the sound again. Its persistence and proximity in the thicket made us change our minds. An instinct made us take refuge in our hammocks. We cautiously moved our cartridges and rifles into them again, and without consulting each other we agreed on the idea of putting our provisions safely away. We passed them up into the hammocks, and we ourselves finally climbed in. Stretched out face down, comfortably suspended with rifles in hand, we did not have to wait long. Black, agile boars quickly appeared from all directions. We welcomed them with shouts of joy and well-aimed shots. Some fell immediately, giving comical snorts, but many more came out of the jungle. We shot again, spending all the cartridges in the magazine.³ Then we stopped to reload. Finding ourselves safe in the height of our hammocks, we continued after a pause.

We counted dozens of them. At a glance we made rapid calculations of the magnitude of the destruction, while the boars continued to come out of the jungle in uncountable numbers. Instead of going on their way or fleeing, they seemed confused. All of them emerged from the jungle where it was easy for us to

shoot them. Occasionally we had to stop firing because the frequent shooting heated the barrels of our rifles. While they were cooling we smoked and were able to joke, celebrating our good fortune. The impotent anger of the boars amazed us. They raised their tusks in our direction, uselessly threatening us. We laughed at their snorts, quietly aimed at those who were near, and Bang! a dead boar. We carefully studied the angle of the shoulder blade so that the bullet would cross the heart. The slaughter lasted for hours.

At 4:00 P.M. we noticed an alarming shortage of our ammunition. We had been well supplied and had shot at will. Though the slaughter was gratifying, the boars must have numbered, as we had been informed previously, several thousands, because their hordes didn't diminish. On the contrary, they gathered directly beneath our hammocks in increasing groups. They slashed furiously at the trunk of the tree which held the four points of the hammocks. The marks of the tusks remained on the hard bark. Not without a certain fear we watched them gather compactly, tenaciously, in tight masses against the resisting trunk. We wondered what would happen to a man who fell within their reach. Our shots were now sporadic, well aimed, carefully husbanded.⁴ They did not drive away the aggressive beasts, but only redoubled their fury. One of us ironically noted that from being the attackers we had gone on the defensive. We did not laugh very long at the joke. Now we hardly shot at all. We needed to save our cartridges.

³ A *magazine* is the supply chamber from which cartridges are fed into the firing chamber.

⁴ To *husband* something is to manage it in a careful, economic way.

Vocabulary

impotent (im' pät änt) *adj.* ineffective, powerless, or helpless

horde (hôrd) *n.* a large group; multitude

tenaciously (ti nă' shəs lē) *adv.* stubbornly; persistently

sporadic (spə rad' ik) *adj.* irregular; occasional

The afternoon waned and evening came upon us. After consulting each other, we decided to eat in our hammocks. We applauded ourselves for taking the food up—meat, bread, and bottles of water. Stretching ourselves on our hammocks, we passed things to each other, sharing what we needed. The boars deafened us with their angry snorts.

After eating, we began to feel calm. We lit cigars. Surely the boars would go. Their numbers were great, but they would finally leave peacefully. As we said so, however, we looked with greedy eyes at the few unused cartridges that remained. Our enemies, like enormous angry ants, stirred beneath us, encouraged by the ceasing of our fire. From time to time we carefully aimed and killed one or two of them, driving off the huge group of uselessly enraged boars at the base of the trunk which served as a prop for our hammocks.

Night enveloped us almost without our noticing the change from twilight. Anxiety also overtook us. When would the cursed boars leave? Already there were enough dead to serve as trophies to several dozen hunters. Our feat would be talked about; we had to show ourselves worthy of such fame. Since there was nothing else to do, it was necessary to sleep. Even if we had had enough bullets it would have been impossible to continue the fight in the darkness. It occurred to us to start a fire to drive the herd off with flames, but apart from the fact that we couldn't leave the place in which we were suspended, there were no dry branches in the lush forest. Finally, we slept.

We woke up a little after midnight. The darkness was profound, but the well-known noise made us aware that our enemies were still there.

We imagined they must be the last ones which were leaving, however. If a good army needs several hours to break camp and march off, what can be expected of a vile army of boars but disorder and delay? The following morning we would fire upon the stragglers, but this painful thought bothered us: they were in large and apparently active numbers. What were they up to? Why didn't they leave? We thus spent long hours of worry. Dawn finally came, splendid in the sky but noisy in the jungle still enveloped inwardly in shadows. We eagerly waited for the sun to penetrate the foliage in order to survey the appearance of the field of battle of the day before.

What we finally saw made us gasp. It terrified us. The boars were painstakingly continuing the work which they had engaged in throughout the entire night. Guided by some extraordinary instinct, with their tusks they were digging out the ground underneath the tree from which our hammocks hung; they gnawed the roots and continued to undermine





Responding to Literature

Personal Response

What emotions did you experience as you read this story? Did any of your reactions surprise you? Explain in your journal.

Analyzing Literature

Recall

1. Who are the main characters in this story? What has brought them together?
2. What preparations do the men make for their journey? What is the purpose of their journey?
3. Describe the location and layout of the camp that the men and their helpers set up.
4. Summarize what happens during the men's first full day in the camp.
5. At what point in the story do the men realize their fate? How do the narrator's actions determine his particular fate?

Interpret

6. What conclusions can you draw about the main characters from the way they spend their free time? Use evidence from the story to support your answer.
7. Rate the preparations the men make for their journey—*Excellent*, *Good*, *Fair*, or *Poor*—in terms of usefulness. Explain your rating.
8. In camp the first evening, what do the men's actions and thoughts seem to indicate about their attitude toward their surroundings?
9. How do the roles played by the men and the boars change as the story progresses? What causes these changes?
10. The narrator says, "I now understood the infamy of the hunter." What do you think he means?

Evaluate and Connect

11. What techniques does the author use to build suspense? Give specific examples from the story.
12. Explain how the **mood** of the story changes as the plot develops. (See Literary Terms Handbook, page R8.)
13. Explain how the terms "self-preservation" and "survival of the fittest" might be applied to this story.
14. How do you feel about what happened to the men? Do you think justice was served? Why or why not?
15. In your opinion, what is the moral, or lesson, that this story teaches?

Literary ELEMENTS

Point of View

Point of view is the relationship of the narrator, or storyteller, to the story. In "The Boar Hunt," the author uses first person point of view—that is, the story is told by one of the characters, referred to as "I." The reader sees everything through the eyes of this character, who is a participant in the hunt.

1. How does the narrator's eyewitness description of events affect your emotional reaction to the story?
 2. Imagine that a different character in the story had been the narrator. Explain how the story might be different when told from that narrator's point of view. For example, in what ways might the descriptions of the characters and events change?
- See **Literary Terms Handbook**, p. R9.



Literature and Writing

Writing About Literature

Cause and Effect Write a paragraph in which you trace the narrator's change in attitude toward hunting. Identify specific events from the story that cause this change. In a second paragraph, compare the narrator's experience with the one you described in the Reading Focus on page 156.

Creative Writing

Eyewitness Account Television talk shows often invite survivors of terrible ordeals to tell their stories. The host usually prepares questions that will lead the guest to tell his or her story. With a partner, write a script for a talk show starring the survivor of "The Boar Hunt."

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Coping with Life An important aspect of Mexican philosophical thought is the idea that human beings are destined to lead tragic lives dominated by conflicts that can never be totally resolved. An individual must learn to cope with conflicts that arise from chance and circumstance, as well as conflicts created by personal desires. In your group, discuss how these ideas might be applied to the characters in "The Boar Hunt."

Internet Connection

Know the Law In the United States, the hunting of wild game has caused the extinction or near extinction of several species of wild animals and birds, including the bison, passenger pigeon, and whooping crane. As a result, laws

have been enacted in many states to limit the hunting of wild animals. Use the Web to research hunting laws in your region. Share your findings with the class.

Interdisciplinary Activity

Art: Create a Mural José Vasconcelos was part of a cultural movement in Mexico that supported muralists. How do you think a muralist might depict "The Boar Hunt"? Draw a sketch of your ideas. Meet with a small group of classmates to compare and discuss your sketches. Then work together to create a mural, using a large piece of art paper, or pieces of poster board taped together. Display your mural in the classroom.

 **Save your work for your portfolio.**

Skill Minilesson

VOCABULARY • Analogies

An analogy is a type of comparison that is based on the relationships between things or ideas. Some analogies are based on synonyms.

sluggish : slow :: lucky : fortunate

Sluggish is a synonym for *slow*; *lucky* is a synonym for *fortunate*.

To finish an analogy, decide what relationship exists between the first two things or ideas. Then apply that relationship to the second pair of words.

● For more about analogies, see **Communications Skills Handbook**, p. R77.

PRACTICE Choose the word that best completes each analogy.

1. horde : mob :: farming :

a. farmer b. agriculture c. land

2. rejuvenate : renew :: annoy :

a. irritate b. avoid c. torture

3. mischief : infamy :: drizzle :

a. sprinkle b. moisture c. downpour

4. exact : precise :: implicit :

a. stated b. understood c. picky