

DIEGO'S CROSSING

by Robert Hough • Lesson Plan prepared by Marla Conn, MS Ed.

Genre: Fiction

Themes: Multicultural; decision-making; growing up; current events; right vs. wrong; crime; violence; Mexico; conflict; family; drug trafficking; gangs

Suitable for: Grades 8+

Common Core standards : RL.9-12.1,2,3,4,5,6
W.9-12.1,2,4,6,7,8,9,10
SL.9-12.1,1c,1d,2,3,4,5,6
L.9-12.3,4,5,6

Diego's Crossing

Diego's Crossing is Robert Hough's first novel for young adults. Capitalizing on the media coverage of the Mexican drug cartels, this book reads like a fast-paced thriller. Seventeen-year-old Diego faces a dilemma: either do a drug run for his gangster brother Ernesto, or risk the lives of his entire family at the hands of a brutal gang.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. What is the central message/ theme of *Diego's Crossing*? (Family, Mexican drug cartels)
2. Describe the "statement" Robert Hough makes when he begins the story. How does the opening chapter set the tone?
3. What is Robert Hough's attitude towards these ideas? How does he develop the themes over the course of *Diego's Crossing*?
4. Describe the point of view of Papi, Mami, Ernesto, and Diego as it relates to drug cartels.
5. How does the author use figurative language throughout the book? Find examples and analyze their role in the text; for example, "Your boss, El Tranquilo, is on thin ice with me."
6. What is "Diego's Crossing?" At what point in the story do you realize the meaning of the title?

7. Describe the tone or feeling of the book as the plot develops. At what point in the book did it feel dark, unhappy, joyful, melancholy, cheerful, pessimistic, fearful, sarcastic, gloomy, and optimistic?
8. Describe Robert Hough's writing style. How does the style contribute to the overall effect that he wishes to create? Why do you think he wrote this book?
9. Discuss the main and supporting characters: Diego, Ernesto, Papi, and Mami. What kinds of people are they? What are their hopes, dreams, beliefs, ideals, fears, strengths, weaknesses, vices, virtues, and talents? Discuss the family dynamic.
10. Describe the relationship between Diego and his father. How is their relationship different than the relationship Papi has with Ernesto?
11. How do the characters conduct themselves throughout the story? What do they do and say to reveal themselves in the beginning, middle, and end of the book?
12. How does Diego change from the beginning to the end of the story?
13. Analyze how an author's choices on how to structure a text, order events within it, and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create effects such as mystery, tension, or surprise.
14. What people, forces, interests, values, and institutions oppose each other in the book? Find examples of man vs. man, man vs. society, man vs. fate, man vs. nature, man vs. self.
15. What does Ernesto's truck symbolize? What other specific objects, colors, names, or settings have been used to represent abstract ideas in the story?
16. How does Robert Hough develop the setting in different parts of the book? How does the setting affect the story? What feelings are evoked by the atmosphere?
17. Diego is a good person in a bad situation. Are there any other ways he could have dealt with the situation?
18. The author leaves the ending of the book to the reader's imagination. What decision do you think Diego makes and why?
19. What reasons would young men in Mexico choose drug running over college or traditional jobs?
20. How are drug addiction and drug cartels related?

21. How do drug cartels in Mexico affect you? Why are drug cartels a “global” problem?
22. Research and write about the impact of illegal drugs and/or drug enforcement policies on society. Are illegal drugs a problem? Why? How do drugs affect family, friends, and neighborhoods?
23. Think about ways to address the problem of drug running and addiction. Debate the pros and cons of the following responses to drugs:
- **Treatment** focuses on the rehabilitation of drug users—with the assumption that this is a medical or mental health issue rather than a criminal one.
 - The **law enforcement** model treats drug possession, as well as sales, as a criminal matter and punishes offenders through the justice system.
 - **Eradication** attempts to reduce production of the illegal substances in other countries.
 - **Interdiction** involves reducing the flow of illegal drugs into the United States by more vigilant patrolling of the nation's borders.