



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 sā' vās cōn sāl' 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 *Quito*¹ 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 clasp 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.

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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 nyón') 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 the area where we proposed to carry out the purpose of our journey, the hunting of wild boars.

We had been informed that boars travel in herds of several thousands, occupying a region, eating grass and staying together, exploiting the grazing areas, organized just like an army. They are very easy to kill if one attacks them when they are scattered out satisfying their appetites—an army given over to the delights of victory. When they march about hungry, on the other hand, they are usually vicious. In our search we glided down river between imposing jungles with our provisions and the company of three faithful Indian oarsmen.

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

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

Though night had scarcely come and the heat was great, we gathered at the fire to see each other's faces, to look instinctively for 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 very thick in the trunk. Stretching out from this

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' ar jē) *n.* sluggish inactivity or drowsiness

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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' pət ənt) *adj.* ineffective, powerless, or helpless
horde (hòrd) *n.* a large group; multitude
tenaciously (ti nā' 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.

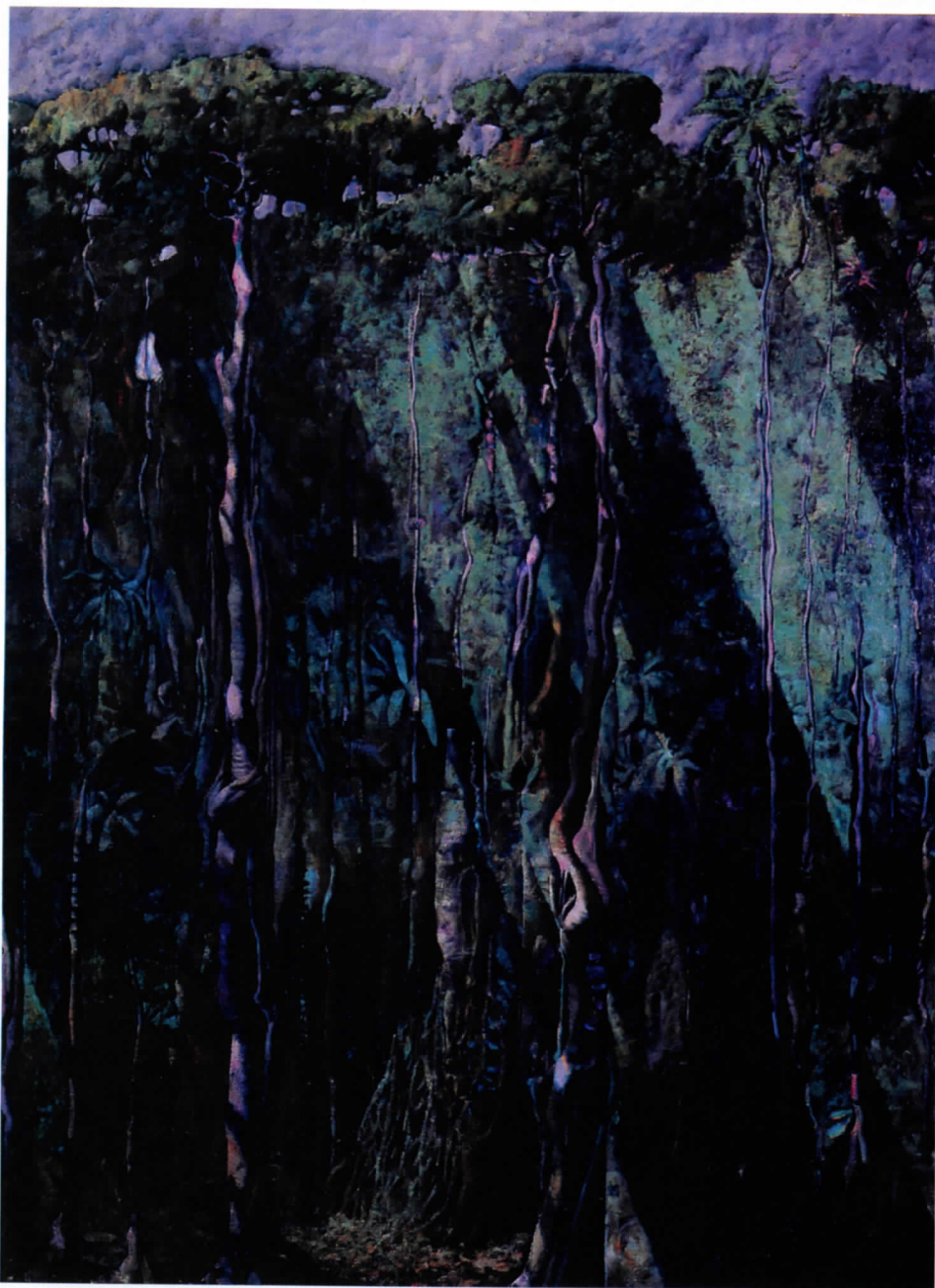
What we finally saw made us gasp. It terrified us. The boars were painstakingly continuing the work which they had engaged in throughout the entire night. Guided by some extraordinary instinct, with their tusks they were digging out the ground underneath the tree from which our hammocks hung; they gnawed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



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them like large, industrious rats. Presently the tree was bound to fall and we with it, among the beasts. From that moment we neither thought nor talked. In desperation we used up our last shots, killing more ferocious beasts.

Still the rest renewed their activity. They seemed to be endowed with intelligence. However much we concentrated our fire against them, they did not stop their attack against the tree.



Foresta Tropical 1 (Jungla), 1985. Armando Morales. Oil on canvas, 64 x 51 in. Private collection.

Viewing the painting: What emotions does the scene in this painting convey to you? How are they similar to the emotions depicted in the end of the story?

Soon our shots stopped. We emptied our pistols, and then silently listened to the tusks gnawing beneath the soft, wet, pleasant-smelling earth. From time to time the boars pressed against the tree, pushing it and making it creak, eager to smash it quickly. We looked on hypnotized by their devilish activity. It was impossible to flee because the black monsters covered every inch in sight. It seemed to us that, by a sudden inspiration, they were preparing to take revenge on us for the ruthless nature of man, the unpunished destroyer of animals since the beginning of time. Our imagination, distorted by fear, showed us our fate as an atonement for the unpardonable crimes implicit in the struggle of biological selection. Before my eyes passed the vision of sacred India, where the believer refuses to eat meat in order to prevent the methodical killing of beasts and in order to atone for man's evil, bloody, treacherous slaughter, such as ours, for mere vicious pleasure. I felt that the multitude of boars was raising its accusing voice against me. I now understood the infamy of the hunter, but what was repentance worth if I was going to die with my companions, hopelessly devoured by that horde of brutes with demonlike eyes?

Stirred by terror and without realizing what I was doing, I hung from the upper end of my hammock, I balanced myself in the air, I swung in a long leap, I grasped a branch of a tree facing the one on which the boars were digging. From there I leaped to other branches and to others, reviving in myself habits which the species had forgotten.

The next moment a terrifying sound and unforgettable cries told me of the fall of the tree and the end of my companions. I clung to a trunk, trembling and listening to the chattering of my jaws. Later, the desire to flee gave me back my strength. Leaning out over the foliage, I looked for a path, and I saw the boars in the distance, marching in compressed ranks and holding their insolent snouts in the air. I knew that they were now withdrawing, and I got down from the tree. Horror overwhelmed me as I approached the site of our encampment, but some idea of duty made me return there. Perhaps one of my friends had managed to save himself. I approached hesitantly. Each dead boar made me tremble with fear.

But what I saw next was so frightful that I could not fix it clearly in my mind: remains of clothing—and footwear. There was no doubt; the boars had devoured them. Then I ran toward the river, following the tracks we had made two days before. I fled with great haste, limbs stiff from panic.

Running with long strides, I came upon the boat. With a great effort, I managed to row to the huts. There I went to bed with a high fever which lasted many days.

I will participate in no more hunts. I will contribute, if I have to, to the extermination of harmful beasts. But I will not kill for pleasure. I will not amuse myself with the ignoble⁵ pleasure of the hunt.

5. *Ignoble* means "without honor or worth" or, since *ig-* is a negative prefix, "not noble."



Vocabulary

atonement (ə tōn' mēnt) *n.* something done to make up for a sin, injury, or loss

implicit (im plis' it) *adj.* suggested but not directly stated

infamy (in' fə mē) *n.* extreme wickedness or shameful evil



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.

