

**Grade Twelve: Theology**  
**Course: Western Philosophy**  
**Text: *The Bridge of San Luis Rey***  
**Author: Thornton Wilder**

### **Main Characters**

Brother Juniper	Abbess Madre Maria del	Uncle Pio
Marquesa de Montemayor	Pilar	Don Jaime
Dona Clara	Esteban	the Viceroy
Pepita	Manuel	
Camila (the Perichole)	Captain Alvarado	

### **Character Reflections**

1. Who is Brother Juniper? Why does he embark on writing a book about the victims of the bridge disaster? What does he hope to show?
2. Why does the Marquesa send such long and detailed letters to her daughter? How does her daughter respond to them?
3. Why have the Marquesa's letters become famous? Why is this so ironic?
4. How is the Marquesa regarded by the people of Lima? Do you think the Marquesa is aware of the Limeans' opinion of her? Do you think she cares?
5. What happened to the Marquesa two days before the bridge collapsed? In what way did she experience a kind of conversion? What might she have said to her daughter in her famous last letter? How did Pepita help provoke this change?
6. What was special about the relationship between Esteban and his brother Manuel? Why were they so closely connected to each other?
7. How was the relationship of Esteban and Manuel challenged? How did each respond to this challenge? Do you think their love for each other waned?
8. How did Manuel die? Why was Esteban so upset by the death of his brother? Why were the townsfolk so moved by Esteban's loss?
9. Who showed kindness to Esteban after the death of his brother? What was he doing prior to his death in the bridge collapse?
10. What did Uncle Pio do for a living? What were some of his distinguishing characteristics? Who was his most prized pupil? How would you describe their relationship as teacher and pupil?
11. What caused the break in the friendship of Uncle Pio and Camila? Why did Camila renounce the theater? Why did she eventually withdraw from the world? How did she respond to Uncle Pio's attempts to reconnect with her?

12. Who was the “master of San Martin”? How did he provoke Brother Juniper to take on his study of the bridge disaster?
13. Why was it so difficult for Brother Juniper to collect information about his subjects?
14. What did Brother Juniper eventually conclude from his project? How was his book received by people?
15. Whom does the Abbess meet at the end of the novel? How are these two meetings a fitting conclusion to the story? What does the Abbess mean when she commands herself to learn “at last that anywhere you may expect grace”?

### **Key Themes**

1. How did the victims of the bridge disaster suffer in their lives even prior to the fatal accident? Could one see their deaths as an act of mercy? Why or why not?
2. How were the Marquesa, Esteban, and Uncle Pio greatly misunderstood in their lives? What aspects of their lives were especially hidden from the view of others? Why might this have been of necessity?
3. What does the author have to say about human memory? How do you understand the author's line, "There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning"?
4. Does the story have anything to teach us about human love? Have any of the characters developed their capacity to love? Have any of the characters regressed in their capacity to love? What does true love require? Which of the characters from the story best displays true love?
5. In what way are characters in the story particularly sensitive about appearances? Who do you think cares the most about the way he or she is perceived by others? How does this self-concern influence the relationships the person forms with others?

### **Summary Questions**

1. Why might one describe Brother Juniper’s project as presumptuous? Yet, what are the virtues of his project? Do you think it is a good thing that he wrote a book about the victims of the bridge disaster?
2. How does the narrator compare himself to Brother Juniper? What can we, the reader, learn from this comparison?
3. Why are the secondary characters so important in this novel—i.e. the ones who did not die in the bridge collapse? What do they add to the story?
4. What made the bridge disaster such a momentous event in the lives of the Limeans? Do you think it is right that an event such as this should have received so much attention? Why or why not? In what way was this event different from other deaths mentioned in the story, including the death of Manuel?
5. Could God's plan (providence) be comprehended by humans? If not, should we cease looking for the purpose in people's lives? What do we mean when we say that a person suffered (or died) without reason?