

The Moor's Account Study Guide

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Plot Summary

The Moor's Account is the fictional memoir of Mustafa ibn Muhammad, a Moroccan slave that was part of a Castilian exploration group exploring La Florida. Mustafa is owned by Señor Dorantes, a captain assigned to the expedition. Their original goal was to explore the land, but greed gets the better of the expedition when they discover trace amounts of gold in one of the Indian villages. The leader of the expedition, governor Narváez, captures a group of Indians. He forcefully extracts information from them about a fabled capital city known as Apalache, which is supposed to be filled with even more gold.

The expedition travels through the land and discovers the city of Apalache, but there is no gold. To make matters worse, they are running low on supplies and have become lost in the unknown land. They try to find a Spanish port where they can get help, but there's nothing to be found. Narváez refuses to give up the idea that there might be gold nearby. He keeps interrogating the Indians for information. He pushes onwards, but the expedition is plagued with sickness, a lack of supplies, and constant attack from the natives.

Throughout the journey, Mustafa reminisces on his past. His family wanted him to become a notary when he was younger, but he defied their wishes and became a merchant. He was fascinated with being a merchant because of how much money they made. His desire for money continued to grow and he soon found himself trading slaves. When the town came under siege, he lost his job and struggled to make any money. With no other way to take care of his family, he sold himself into slavery.

The expedition soon falls apart and the survivors are scattered throughout the region. Mustafa and his master along with some of his other companions manage to find a friendly Indian tribe. Mustafa learns their language and customs and gets help for the expedition. Disease forces them to move once again, their numbers much smaller. Madness begins to set in for some of the survivors, who desert the group and end up resorting to cannibalism. A few members give up on returning home and try to find home amongst the Indians.

Mustafa feels terrified, but also free on his journey. The survivors have all been reduced to nothing, but that makes them equal. They try to get what help they can from the tribes, but their numbers continue to dwindle. Dorantes brother, Diego, is slain by a tribe of Indians which sends Dorantes spiraling into depression. He abandons the camp, leaving Mustafa with the other lone survivor, Castillo. Mustafa is eventually reunited with his master at another tribe, where they encounter another survivor, Cabeza de Vaca.

Together, the four become legends amongst the different tribes thanks to their medical knowledge. Soon, they are all wed by the tribe. They spend years traveling together, treating different tribes and gathering a large group of followers. Eventually, they run into fellow Castilians, who bring them to New Spain. They are welcomed back amongst their



own, but for Mustafa this means becoming a slave once again. To make matters worse, his wife is enslaved alongside him.

Mustafa is sent on his master's behalf on another expedition. Mustafa recognizes that this expedition is as failed as the last. He tricks the leader of the expedition, letting him and his wife travel ahead of the group to act as emissaries. Each time they send false information back to deter the expedition, making them believe there are no riches and the lands are dangerous. Mustafa fakes his own death and escapes from the expedition with his pregnant wife, determined to live a free life with her.



Chapter 1

Summary

The book opens in the year of 934 with the main character, Mustafa ibn Muhammad, arriving with a small Castilian exploration group at the coast of La Florida. Mustafa has been a slave for five years and was renamed Estebanico by his master, Señor Dorantes. The group explores an abandoned Indian village once they arrive. Mustafa is fascinated by the Indians as he's heard many legends about them, which make them sound like a mystical race. Mustafa finds a strange looking pebble, which turns out to be a piece of gold. He gives it to his master, who shows it to the governor and leader of the expedition, Don Pánfilo Narváez. The governor is pleased, and over the next few days he sets up the rest of the expedition in the abandoned village.

A few days later, a group of soldiers catch four Indians hiding in the bushes. They are brought before the governor who questions them about the gold that Mustafa had found. Mustafa doesn't know what they are saying, but whatever it is doesn't seem to please the governor. He orders his soldiers to bind the Indians and bring him a whip to flog them. While the Indians are being whipped, Señor Dorantes's younger brother, Diego, comes by and asks why the governor is whipping them. Apparently, the Narváez can understand the Indians despite never taking an expedition before. He says that the Indians lie and the flogging is necessary to get the truth.

After the whipping, Narváez gathers the leaders of the expedition. He tells them how he learned there was even more gold located to the north in a kingdom known as Apalache. The governor wants to go after the kingdom, but he believes their expedition is too large to go at once. Instead, he wants to send a smaller group to capture Apalache while the rest of the group establishes a base of operations. One of Señor Dorantes friends, Señor Castillo, disagrees and calls the journey too risky. Don Narváez insists that it will be safe because the Indians don't have the means to fight back against the superior Castilians. Mustafa is excited by the expedition and fantasizes that with all the wealth his master gets, he might let Mustafa go free and return home as an act of kindness.

The expedition starts to travel north to Apalache. The trip is difficult because of wild animals and limited rations. The group arrives at a river, which they decide to name the Río Oscuro. At the river they run into a large group of Indians. The governor attempts to speak with them, demanding the Indians bring the expedition to Apalache. Narváez brings forth the four Indian prisoners he took. This causes the other Indians to attack. The battle is brutal and Mustafa is nearly killed, but the Castilians prevail thanks to their superior weapons.



Analysis

The initial plot is set up, establishing the governor's greed as well as making Mustafa's position as a slave and an outsider very clear. Many of the relationships are established in the first chapter, such as Dorantes's friendship with Castillo and his familial relationship with Diego. Castillo is the first to point out the dangers associated with the expedition, but the governor refuses to listen. This highlights one of the major themes of the book - the Dangers Associated with Greed. The governor isn't concerned with the dangers because all he wants is gold. This is again reiterated when Narváez decides to capture and torture the Indians for information about the gold. Human rights and basic respect for life is not shown, and Narváez is shown to be completely consumed by his greed.

Mustafa's Desire for Freedom is established right away, which is another theme demonstrated in this chapter. Freedom is a dream that Mustafa carries throughout the majority of the book. Mustafa's kind nature also shines through when he feels responsible for the Indians getting flogged, since it only happened because he found the piece of gold. The Castilians flaunt their superiority several times throughout the chapter, which touches upon another one of the themes of the book. They make it clear they feel they deserve the land and start renaming it, with little concern for the original owners.

This type of conquest mentality is pervasive throughout the novel, as evidenced by Mustafa's capture, initially. Through his eyes the reader is able to see the brutality and the attitude of entitlement that the conquistadors utilize in order to continue to perpetuate their violence. Most explorers owed their allegiance to the leaders of their country, or the to the church (or both), and thus had to have something tangible to show for all of the outlay of capital. To return home without anything was unthinkable. Thus, Narváez's attitude is one of domination and acquisition. He means to plunder and take whatever he can in order to fulfill his obligations, as well as make a name and fortune for himself.

It is interesting to note that Mustafa seems a bit naive, in the face of such brutality and indifference, to believe that once Narváez has conquered the Indians and found gold that he will send Mustafa home. This indicates that Mustafa still believes in the possibility of the goodness of mankind, if given the opportunity. This allows for greater character development and suggests dramatic irony, in that the reader can tell that Narváez is not a man who is going to consider the morality or ethics of returning a slave to his former country, let alone set him free.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the theme of Greed as it is portrayed in Chapter 1.



Discussion Question 2

What could be the motivation for changing Mustafa's name to Estebanico?

Discussion Question 3

What allows the conquistadors to survive the battle with the Indians near the river, Rio Oscuro?

Vocabulary

concoctions, braziers, indelible, pestilential, itinerant, vanity, idioms



Chapter 2

Summary

The chapter opens with Mustafa thinking back to his birth. His mother, Heniya, had been married twice before, but both of her husbands passed away. Everyone started to think she was cursed, since the marriages didn't last very long. His father, Muhammad, was an unlucky man who consistently seemed to get hurt or sick. Because of that, he was a scholar to avoid the dangers that came with a more physical profession. Mustafa's parents fell for each other and after getting married wanted to return to Muhammad's home, Azemmur. Heniya was already pregnant with Mustafa on the trip. When they got to a crossing barge, there was a pair of Portuguese soldiers dragging a prisoner. The soldiers insisted they should be allowed to pass first. In a rare moment of bravery, Muhammad stood up to the soldiers. He got sliced in the arm, but the other travelers started to shout at and throw stones at the soldiers. Their horses were spooked and ran away with the prisoner, causing them to leave.

On the barge, Heniya gave birth to Mustafa. When they arrived in Azemmur, a doctor treated Muhammad. His arm had become infected and they had to amputate it. Ten years later the family were still living with Mustafa's uncle, Abdullah. Muhammad was making a living as a successful notary, even with his injury. Over the years, his parents had three other children. He had a sister, Zainab and twin brothers, Yahya and Yusuf. Muhammad wanted Mustafa to follow in his footsteps. He made him spend his days studying and didn't let him play outside like the other boys. Mustafa hated this and stayed silent whenever his father took him to work. Mustafa was determined to become a rich merchant and not just a silent recorder.

Back in the present, Mustafa laments the decisions that he made that resulted in him becoming a slave to Navarez. The reader learns that he did become a merchant, but was unsuccessful, and ended up selling himself into slavery.

Analysis

Mustafa's family is introduced in this chapter, which is important because through his past the reader comes to understand the man that he used to be and how he ended up as a slave on the expedition. The subject of greed is touched upon again at the end of the chapter. Mustafa isn't happy being a simple notary; he wants a more luxurious job which is what pushes him into becoming a merchant. Another theme that is demonstrated is the importance of communication and stories. Mustafa saw how successful his father was as a notary, but he instead chooses a riskier profession which hurts him later on when, unlike his father, he isn't able to provide and take care of his family, leaving him with no other option but to sell himself into slavery.



Something that Mustafa does learn from his mother's story is the price of resistance. Throughout the book, Mustafa goes out of his way to avoid starting conflicts, unlike the Castilians. He knows what happened when his father stood up to the soldiers. If the Castilians had learned a similar lesson the expedition might not have met with failure as they wouldn't have to worry about the Indians hunting them throughout the land. Compromising, communicating, these are the things that Mustafa has learned work better than brute force. However, he does not share this with Navarez or the others.

In many ways, Mustafa is unlike many of the other slaves. He has willingly offered himself up to be a slave, whereas many of the others have been captured and forced to work without their consent. Mustafa believes that, unlike the others, that he may be freed if he serves his time of indenture to the Castilians. However, he will be mistaken. At the time of this chapter he's been with them for five years.

Discussion Question 1

What clues indicate that Mustafa is naive?

Discussion Question 2

What does the reader learn about Mustafa's past in regards to his own family?

Discussion Question 3

How has greed and ambition caused Mustafa to end up as a slave?

Vocabulary

virtue, hospice, pensive, keen, credentials



Chapter 3

Summary

The expedition buries three of the men that were lost during the battle with the Indians at the river. Afterwards, they continue on their journey. Señor Dorantes asks Mustafa if he had fed his horse any of the Indian fruit that Mustafa kept picking. Mustafa insists that he didn't, although he had given the horse a few pieces of fruit because he hated to see how hungry it was because of the strict rationing. Mustafa is able to convince Señor Dorantes that his horse just isn't getting enough water. Señor Dorantes gives orders for Mustafa to secure more water. If he can't, Señor Dorantes will flog him. Mustafa trades the hatchet he took from an Indian for the water, figuring that the weapon isn't worth getting whipped over. While he is returning, Mustafa thinks back on how greedy and ambitious his master has acted in the past. Señor Dorantes is pleased when Mustafa returns, which again makes him think about getting his freedom at the end of the trip.

The Indian prisoners lead the group to an empty village, which the governor decides to call Santa María. They search the village and end up finding a few more pieces of gold. The governor is unhappy with the general lack of gold. He decides to interrogate the prisoners, torturing them for several nights. One of the priests, Father Anselmo, tries to get Señor Dorantes to do something about the torture. Nothing is done, but it's clear that many of the men don't approve. Mustafa manages to sneak some food to the Indians, but he can't actually speak to them since they don't understand one another.

Mustafa thinks back to his past. He was once a slave trader himself, responsible for selling three people into slavery. This makes him think that it was fitting he became a slave himself. Señor Dorantes has been kinder than some of his previous masters who physically abused him, but it was clear that he still thought of Mustafa as just a slave. Señor Castillo speaks with the governor about taking a few soldiers down the river to secure a port and signal to the others where they were. At first the governor disagrees. He's still determined to find Apalache, not believing the prisoners when they say this village was in fact Apalache. He eventually relents and gives Señor Castillo several days to travel down the river.

Analysis

Dorantes's greedy nature shines through again. He cares little for the supplies brought by the rest of the expedition. Not only that, but he puts the needs of his horse above the needs of the people with him. Not only has Mustafa been getting meager rations throughout the trip, but Dorantes threatens to physically punish Mustafa if he isn't able to get water, something that he technically shouldn't be allowed. The governor, Navarez, continues to show his greed as well with his pursuit of gold. His sense of entitlement shines through once again when he decides to rename the village with little regard for the original name.



Father Anselmo shows his good nature by trying to get the torture to stop. This is important because it lets the reader know that not all of the Castilians on the expedition are wicked men. Mustafa's positive nature shines through as well when he feeds the Indians. This is accompanied by the revelation that he once sold slaves himself. With this revelation the theme of Learning from the Past, is demonstrated. At the time Mustafa didn't seem to grasp the weight of slavery. After having been enslaved himself he has a newfound appreciation for just how devastating it is to take away someone's freedom. This mindset helps Mustafa attempt to communicate with the Indians because he can relate to them and doesn't just see himself as superior.

The governor refuses Castillo's offer to secure the port, something that he continues to do for the majority of the expedition. His pride makes it so he can't see the wisdom being offered to him from the men serving underneath him. By repeatedly ignoring the requests to secure a port, he ends up dooming the expedition.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Navarez feel he can rename anything or anyone?

Discussion Question 2

Compare Father Anselmo to Navarez.

Discussion Question 3

What does Mustfa come to realize about the Indians and about slavery, in general?

Vocabulary

frenetic, mutilated, enjoined, reprimanded, ire, errant, provenance



Chapter 4

Summary

Mustafa thinks back to a story his mother told him when he was 13. At that age, he was still skipping out on his scholarly pursuits because he wanted to become a merchant. His mother told him a story about a skilled embroider who became fascinated when she was working her craft for the Sultan's palace. Her mother had warned her about going to the palace, but she went anyway. She had to pretend to be a musician in his court. She didn't know how to play, so she got thrown out and her fingers were damaged in the process. Mustafa wasn't sure if he was the young girl in the story, or if his father was the Sultan who didn't appreciate his skills.

Some time later, Mustafa's father was celebrating that the town was refusing to pay the Portuguese taxes. The Portuguese responded by bringing their ships into the harbor, effectively laying siege to the town. Azemmur had only a small garrison, nothing that could stand up to the Portuguese forces. Mustafa's father was determined to join the army if need be so they could fight back. A week later, the Portuguese finally attacked and Azemmur could offer no real resistance. The city remained under siege and they were forced to pay taxes.

Mustafa finished his education and told his father that he wanted a job as a merchant. His father pleaded with him to choose a different career, warning him that being a merchant would make him greedy and he would never be happy. Despite that, he did help his son become a merchant. Mustafa failed to listen to his father and became obsessed with his trade. He didn't care what he was selling; only that he was making a profit. This is what led to him selling slaves. Mustafa was successful, but his father was depressed with the choice he made as well as the defeat from the Portuguese. Mustafa's mother kept asking when he would marry, but he insisted that he wanted to take care of his family and wasn't rushing to find a wife.

Analysis

Mustafa reflects on the story of the embroiderer and the Sultan. This once again demonstrates the theme of Learning From the Past. When his mother told him the story, it was warning about greed. He didn't listen though and he still decided to become a merchant because he found it more profitable and thrilling. This is what leads him down the path of becoming a slave.

Mustafa's father also demonstrates this theme of Learning From the Past. When he was younger, he tried to resist the army and it caused him to lose his arm. Instead of learning from this, he wants to try and fight against the Portuguese again. Things go very poorly for the city because they are relying on reinforcements that aren't going to come. As a result, the city was put under siege and once again forced to pay taxes. This



had a devastating effect on the economy and is partially the reason Mustafa lost his job. His father fell into a depression because of this and is unable to help the family. Thus, the old adage about those not learning from the past being doomed to repeat it plays out in this chapter.

Though Mustafa as a younger man, refused to believe that he was like his father in any way, the reader can see that he is exactly like his father. Both of them continue to take actions that repeatedly turn out for the worst. Both choose to fight battles that they cannot hope to win, and both don't know when to think things through before taking action. This is true when Mustafa's father stands up to the men on the barge, with greater numbers, and again when his father joins in the uprising against the Portuguese. Likewise, Mustafa is similar in that he was warned that becoming a merchant would change his very nature. He ignores this advice and all semblance of ethics and morality leave him. Only now, as a slave, does he have the perspective to see his former self with any clarity.

Discussion Question 1

Compare Mustafa to his father.

Discussion Question 2

What clearly indicates that Mustafa's father, nor Mustafa have completely learned their lessons from past mistakes?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Musfafa's personality before he became a slave.

Vocabulary

malice, folly, luminous, discordant, bravado, grudgingly, quarrel, vexed, melancholy



Chapter 5

Summary

Mustafa and the others continue to wait in the village while the governor learns more. The group he sent to the port eventually return, claiming they couldn't find any port and believed they were lost. During this time, Mustafa notes that his master barely pays any attention to his actual brother, Diego, but seems to treat Señor Castillo like a brother. Everyone seems disheartened, but the governor tells them he's figured out the problem. The area they are in is called Apalache, but there is also a capital kingdom with the same name. The prisoners did lead them to Apalache, but only the general area and not the specific capital where the riches are.

The expedition sets off again. They run into another group of Indians, and these are much more peaceful than the last group. They are led by a chief named Dulchanchellin. Dulchanchellin and the governor reach a deal, and he helps lead them towards the capital. They reach a river that one soldier tries to cross, believing they don't need rafts. He is wrong and perishes in the water. They eventually cross the river, using rafts, and continue on their way to Apalache. A soldier is caught stealing, but the governor says they'll deal with him later once they reach the capital. This seems to be the mantra that everyone is repeating; that things will change and get resolved once they finally reach the fabled capital. For Mustafa, he dreams of his freedom once they finally arrive at Apalache.

Analysis

The governor should turn back and try to locate the port, but instead he lets his greed guide him towards the city of Apalache. The governor isn't the only one that is being guided by greed. As Mustafa notes, the rest of the expedition is just as excited to keep marching to get their gold. Even Mustafa is eager to go because he hopes that his master will be generous enough to let him go. The expedition later faces disaster because of the governor's choice to keep ignoring the warning from his other captains to turn back so that they can find a port so they can resupply. The theme of greed is highlighted by the soldier who tries to cross the river. He doesn't want to wait for rafts and just pushes forward, which costs him his life. Thus, the author is stating that greed often overrides good judgement and rationality.

Dorantes's relationship with Diego is explored for the first time. Instead of treating him like a brother, he gives his attention and affection to his friend, Castillo. Although Mustafa doesn't note it in this chapter, it's clear later that Dorantes only gives respect towards men of high rank, like Castillo and the governor. Dorantes continually flaunts his superiority and despises doing anything that he considers to be beneath his station. Thus, Dorantes is shown to be ambitious and opportunistic. In him Mustafa sees who he has once been, when he was formerly a merchant.



Mustafa seems to view his time as a slave as a learning event in his life, one which was necessary for him to find his way back to his true self. He believes that finding Apalache, like the others, will give him his heart's desire, which is Freedom. Indeed, most of the party's greed leads them all to believe that once they have obtained their riches that their lives will be vastly improved and that they will enjoy certain freedoms. However, the author is trying to indicate that this is a false assumption on their part, and that to equate attainment of wealth with freedom is a false type of logic.

Discussion Question 1

What does the soldier's rash actions at the river indicate about greed and the nature of it?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Mustafa equate wealth with freedom?

Discussion Question 3

Who is Dorantes and what has the reader learned about him in his chapter?

Vocabulary

iridescent, yearning, gaunt, aloof, primitive, jovial, commensurate



Chapter 6

Summary

Mustafa thinks back to life at home, before he was a slave. His father's health had continued to dwindle. There was a fierce drought and food was hard to come by. Mustafa, like many others, lost his job. He hid this fact from his family. His father passed away in the following year, and after that, the house began to empty as Mustafa's uncles left because they, too, had no money. Mustafa did what he could to provide, selling the goods he once cherished. He finally had to tell his mother the truth, but she already knew. With nowhere else to turn, Mustafa sold himself into slavery, hoping that the money his family got would be enough to last them for another year.

Analysis

Mustafa realizes that he was wrong to choose to become a merchant, because of the way it made him view people. His wealth wasn't enough to save his family and he had to give up all of those possessions he once fought so hard to obtain. Now, with some distance from the actual event, Mustafa is able to see that it wasn't the profession, itself, that caused him to act unethical, but a weakness in himself that placed emphasis on things that, in the long run, weren't worth the trouble. He is able to see how greed and focusing solely on the attainment of wealth has caused the downfall of not only his owner, but also those in association with him.

Mustafa shows that he wasn't completely driven by greed. When he sells himself into slavery he isn't doing it for himself, but because he wants to take care of his family. His bond with his family is very important, since one of his goals for the majority of the book is to return home to them. He considers that at least in this way he is different from the Castilians who show little regard for family ties.

Discussion Question 1

What has Mustafa learned as a result of being a slave for so long?

Discussion Question 2

What regrets does Mustafa seem to have?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Mustafa decide to become a slave?

Vocabulary

distended, scant, famine, scourge, adornment, gaunt, immaculate, haggard, tranquil



Chapter 7

Summary

The expedition continues marching towards Apalache. Señor Dorantes is unhappy that Señor Cabeza de Vaca has been chosen to lead the scouting group into the capital city. Cabeza returns shortly and the expedition is disappointed to find only a small city. Everyone searches the city, but nobody finds any gold or other precious metals. The city is at least well stocked with food and other basic provisions. Everyone is disheartened, but the governor keeps insisting there must be something of value.

Later that evening, many of the men take advantage of the Indian women that are imprisoned in the city. Mustafa protests against this treatment, but his master doesn't do anything. They just try to ignore the cries of the women.

The next day, a large group of Indians arrive in the city. The governor tries to speak with them, but it just ends in a fight. The next few days are very tense and the men are constantly ambushed whenever they step foot outside of the village. Everyone's morale is low. The governor calls his captains together and tells them their new plan is to go to a city on the coast, Aute. He wants a small expedition to go out and claim the city so they can regroup and resupply. He still believes there's gold to be found in the area. Señor Castillo tries to disagree, but the governor threatens him with mutiny. Señor Castillo backs down. The next day the governor announces that they're marching to Aute.

Analysis

Dorantes's rivalry with Cabeza de Vaca is shown for the first time. This once again shows Dorantes's greed because he's upset that Cabeza de Vaca was chosen because he, Dorante, wanted the prestige. The governor continues to learn from past mistakes. He refuses to accept the fact that he was wrong about the treasure in the city. He convinces everyone that it is there, choosing to search for gold when he should be trying to get back to the fleet to resupply. Castillo tries to convince him that he's wrong, but he continues to deny the obvious truth.

The soldiers show their greed and elitist mentalities by taking advantage of the Indian women. It's clear that they don't value them as people and believe they can take whatever they want from the Indians. Mustafa tries to get his master to do something because he feels for the Indians and knows what it's like to feel helpless. This foreshadows a future encounter where Mustafa tries to exact revenge for the injustice committed by the soldiers.



Discussion Question 1

What does the treatment of the Indian women by the soldiers indicate about their attitude toward the natives?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Mustafa try to intervene on behalf of the Indian women?

Discussion Question 3

What is the governor's justification for continuing to move forward?

Vocabulary

concealing, earnestness, zeal, flank, fortified, opulent, obscene, gilded, precarious



Chapter 8

Summary

Mustafa thinks back to when he was sold into slavery. The ship ride to Seville was harsh and the slaves were treated just like cargo. When they arrived, they were brought to the church to be baptized. This is where Mustafa was given the name of Estebanico. He was bought by a merchant, Bernardo Rodriguez. Bernardo was inexperienced in owning a slave, so his rules were constantly changing. He could rapidly shift between being kind and being cruel. Mustafa felt defeated, especially since he was unable to pray. Things started to look up when his master purchased another slave, a girl named Elena. Mustafa and Elena started to talk whenever they could. He found out that her real name was Ramatullai, and she had two daughters. She asked about the man that sold her into slavery, and Mustafa promised to keep an eye out for him if he ever showed up at Rodriguez's shop. That night, Mustafa went to sleep without the usual sense of dread since he had been enslaved.

Analysis

In this flashback, Mustafa experiences defeat at the hands of Rodriguez. He was denied his very basic human rights because Rodriguez and the others didn't treat him like a human being. They stripped him of every possible right, even his name. There is a glimmer of hope when Mustafa meets Ramatullai and it becomes clear that they both have feelings for one another. Rodriguez is yet another character that demonstrates the theme of greed. He isn't buying slaves because he needs them, but because he likes the prestige that comes with it. This is why he purchases a second slave, even though his wife was unhappy with the first. His greed eventually gets the better of him when he becomes addicted to gambling.

This chapter predominantly demonstrates both the themes and corruptive influence of greed and elitist/entitled mentality. Those in charge become ensnared in a cycle of gain and loss, where there never seems to be enough to sate their desire to be at the top. They seek prestige and honor, respect, among those they consider their peers, but in the end, even when they gain this, they are unhappy. As someone on the outside of this, Mustafa recognizes a bit of himself in them, and is ashamed. He also learns that misery loves company and when a slave girl is added to his master's collection, he is grateful for another person in his station of life with whom to speak and share experiences.

Discussion Question 1

Describe what an elitist/entitled attitude is and which characters exemplify this.



Discussion Question 2

Who is Elena and why is she important to the story?

Discussion Question 3

How is the theme of greed demonstrated in this chapter?

Vocabulary

multitude, periodically, apprehend, briny, edifice, cacophony, avaricious, exigent



Chapter 9

Summary

The expedition arrives at Aute, but the Indians have burned the city to the ground. On top of that, the expedition had been harassed on the way there. Members are starting to contract a fever, and there is always the risk of being attacked by hidden archers. The governor orders Señor Dorantes, Castillo, and Cabeza to go scouting for the ships. Despite their best efforts, they are unable to find any trace of the ships. While they are searching, Señor Dorantes speaks with Mustafa and learns how he came to be enslaved. When they return, things are grim at the camp. Many of the soldiers have contracted the fever, and there are even a few men that try to desert the camp. The governor has withdrawn into his tent and seems to have lost faith in the expedition.

Aute is no longer safe, so they retreat to the beach. Mustafa suggests that they build rafts so they can get to the port of Pánuco. The governor agrees and the men spend the next five weeks fashioning rafts out of whatever supplies they have on hand. They're forced to kill their own horses, both for food as well as supplies. Finally, they are able to construct five rafts and load the surviving men on board so they can get to safety.

Analysis

Things continue to get worse for the expedition. The Indians show they've learned from their past experiences with the Castilians. Instead of letting their cities get raided for supplies, they burn it to the ground. This hurts the Castilians because they were already struggling for supplies. The governor stubbornly refuses to admit defeat. Even when he's finally forced out of Aute, he's determined to resupply and return to the land to find gold that very clearly doesn't exist.

Dorantes shows some concern for Mustafa for the first time when he asks about his story. Mustafa has a hard time with this because he doesn't feel like Dorantes is asking out of sympathy. Instead, he feels like he's losing the one thing that he had left to himself, his story. Given the way that Dorantes treats Mustafa later on in the book, it's implied that he was only asking about Mustafa because he was looking for something to fill the time and not because he genuinely cared about Mustafa.

Mustafa speaks up for the first time. As the expedition continues to meet with failure, Mustafa grows more confident because he stops feeling like a slave and instead feels like an equal. The governor has a hard time accepting the plan, likely because it came from a slave. Desperation eventually forces them to try and build rafts so they can get to the port. Thus, the theme of Working Together is demonstrated. Working together is the only way that the expedition is going to survive and at this point, there is very little class division. Mustafa begins to have hope that they will all be treated better after this.



Discussion Question 1

Describe the governor's mental state during this time.

Discussion Question 2

What makes the governor relent and agree to build the rafts?

Discussion Question 3

As a result of the cooperative effort, what does Mustafa believe?

Vocabulary

kindled, aversion, reconnaissance, amiably, antagonism, cordial, somber



Chapter 10

Summary

Mustafa thinks back to his time as a slave in Seville. Ramatullai had just heard news of her daughter being owned by someone in the city. Mustafa helped her write a letter to her daughter, but they never found out if it reached her or not. The two continued to grow closer. Rodriguez's business was growing, which caused him to become more greedy and arrogant. He constantly bickered with his wife, who tried to keep him grounded in reality. One evening, he forced himself upon Ramatullai. Mustafa didn't have the courage to try and stop him. After that incident, the two started performing minor acts of rebellion while they served him. It was their way of striking back.

Rodriguez started to run into trouble with his gambling. Ramatullai reported to Mustafa one night that she overheard the family talking. They were going to have to sell one of their slaves to cover their debt. Mustafa thought it would be Ramatullai, but it ended up being him. While he was being sold to his new master, Señor Dorantes, he ran into the man that had sold Ramatullai into slavery. He felt badly that he couldn't tell her about it, and he felt even worse that he would never get the chance to speak with Ramatullai again.

Analysis

Rodriguez loses all of his wealth when he lets his greed overpower him. His relationship with his wife suffers as well, and he retreats into the comforts of the tavern, where he gambles his fortune away. Two themes are demonstrated in this chapter. First, there is the refusal of Rodriguez to Learn From the Past, and so he finds himself losing the wealth he worked so hard to attain.

Secondly, the theme of Entitlement is noticeable when he forces himself on Ramatullai. Mustafa wishes that he could do something to help her, but he's powerless to do anything. This event is part of what makes him so angry later on when León confesses to violating one of the Indian women. The stronger taking advantage of the weaker is something that continues to be placed in front of Mustafa because in many ways this is just what he did when he was a merchant. He had little regard for how his transactions or deals affected anyone and he believed that his money gave him the right to do whatever he wanted. Now, of course, he sees that just because someone could do something because of their power, it doesn't mean that they should, or that it is their right to do so. His perspective has changed.

Discussion Question 1

As a result of Ramatullai's rape, what does Mustafa decide?



Discussion Question 2

What small acts of rebellion do Ramatullai and Mustafa do in retaliation for Ramatullai's rape?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Learning from the Past in regards to Rodriguez.

Vocabulary

incantation, comportment, reprisals, scandalous, unimpeachable, drudgery, lucrative



Chapter 11

Summary

Things are rough for the expedition. After a few days, their water supply becomes contaminated by the makeshift containers they made. Everyone tries to keep their spirits up. They come upon an Indian village which they quickly raid. Mustafa feels guilty about taking supplies from the village, but he is too desperate and thirsty to leave the supplies behind. Señor Dorantes and Castillo criticize the governor for taking too many supplies from the village. They think taking more than what is needed will cause the Indians to chase after them, but the governor doesn't care. Nobody else seems to either, and all they can think about is getting to Pánuco. On the boat, Diego and Mustafa speak. Diego reassures Mustafa he will see his family again when he sees how much Mustafa misses them.

The expedition finds another island, but there is no source of water nearby. The ration master is desperate for a drink, so he drinks from the sea water. Within an hour he has gotten sick and eventually passes away. The expedition is saved by a strong storm. The winds guide their ships faster, and the rain gives them something fresh to drink. They arrive at a new island where the governor gives away some of his jewelry as tribute. This gets him a meeting with a friendly chief, Echogan. The governor tells Echogan they only came to spread enlightenment on behalf of their king. He asks Echogan if he has seen any other men like him, but he hasn't. The chief is generous and shares some of his supplies with the expedition, even sending some food to the men who were too sick to get off the boat.

Later that night, the expedition is chased away. Nobody knows what happened, but all of a sudden the Indians were hurling rocks and shooting arrows at the group. They were forced to leave many of their members behind while they fled from the aggressive Indians. They simply didn't have the supplies left to defend themselves. Mustafa wonders if it is divine retribution for their earlier raid on the Indian village. Several days later, the expedition was once again in bad spirits. The ocean has become rougher, so Señor Dorantes urges the governor to try and tie the boats together to weather the rough waters. He ignores the pleas, and then declares that it is every man for himself, leaving all of the other rafts to try and fend for themselves.

Analysis

Mustafa is one of the only members of the expedition to ever express guilt about taking supplies from the Indians. The Castilians are eager to take whatever they want because they think as superiors they are allowed to take whatever they want. A few of the members do point out how greedy they are being, but the governor doesn't care. He once again hasn't learned his lesson. When he stole supplies before and imprisoned Indians, he caused the expedition to get attacked. All he cares about is resupplying now,



so he doesn't even stop to consider that his actions might once again be hurting the expedition. In this way, then, the theme of Greed, is shown to be isolating and cruel.

Mustafa never finds out exactly what causes the Indians to attack, but the reader is given the implication that it was the governor's attitude towards them. Whenever he interacts with the Indians he acts like he's above them and that they are obligated to help him. He's never grateful for the help that they offer him. His greed is shown for the final time when he gives up on the expedition and declares that it's every ship for themselves. He could have tried banding together as the captains suggested, but he didn't want to take the risk and cares only about his own survival.

The theme of Elitism is shown in this chapter as well, when the Indians attack in the middle of the night. The governor has, once again, adopted an air of entitlement towards the natives and they have retaliated against it. The entire expedition nearly loses their lives and only narrowly escape. Later, Mustafa wonders when the governor will open his eyes and learn his lesson. He also realizes that there are no good excuses for treating others as if they are subhuman.

Discussion Question 1

How is the theme of Elitism/entitlement demonstrated in this chapter?

Discussion Question 2

What does Mustafa decide about the governor after the Indians run them off?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the character of the governor; what is his tragic flaw?

Vocabulary

benevolence, propriety, scouring, resigned, oppressive, indolently



Chapter 12

Summary

Mustafa and the rest of his shipmates make it to an island. Mustafa goes to speak with the nearby Indians, even against the orders of his master. He decides that after everything that happened now he should be considered a free man. Most of the expedition disagrees because they are afraid of the Indians. With Diego's help, Mustafa is able to negotiate with the Indians. He returns with plenty of supplies for the expedition. Several of the soldiers still disagree and are distrustful of the Indians. They decide to go off on their own and promise to return with help.

The remaining members decide that their only course of action is to set up camp for the winter so they can recover and get ready to make the journey when the season is more agreeable. They run into Señor Cabeza de Vaca who also made it to the island. His soldiers had left as well, but he still had some members who were also forming their own camp. The expedition beg from the Indians, but eventually they have to work for all the food they are given. They aren't nearly as skilled as the Indians though. Mustafa makes friends with one of the natives, Kwachi. This helps him master some of the Indian language. They start to barter some of their goods, which helps to get them additional food. A sickness spreads throughout the island, taking many of the expedition as well as the Indians.

One of the soldiers eventually returns. He confesses that the rest of the men went mad and started to eat one another. The expedition banishes him, but when the Indians find out they kill the soldier. The winter is harsh and sickness continues to take many lives. Eventually, the expedition is ready to leave, though they only number 12 now. They go to Señor Cabeza de Vaca's camp, where he has fared even worse. He has only three men left. He refuses to leave because he has fallen in love with an Indian. The other two are also unwilling to leave. Mustafa and the rest of the expedition make their way off the island with some final help from the Indians.

Analysis

Mustafa becomes more assertive when he goes to speak with the Indians. He's starting to break away from the shackles of slavery because he's realizing that nobody in the expedition has any right to exert their control over him anymore. After everything they've been through, they're all equal. The majority of the Castilians still feel superior to the Indians and don't even want to interact with the Indians, even with how desperate they are for supplies, and thus the theme of Elitism is demonstrated and shown to be completely illogical and destructive. In fact, the soldiers even choose to desert the group because they can't even imagine working with the Indians, who they consider to be savages. Diego shows that he is different from the rest of the expedition and he agrees to go with Mustafa, treating him like an equal.



The greed of the soldiers is shown when one of them returns. He confesses to resorting to cannibalism. If they had chosen to stay and work with the expedition they wouldn't have had to murder one another. Many of the Castilians complain about the tasks they are forced to perform because they consider the Indian ways to be beneath them. Dorantes expresses this belief throughout the entirety of the book. His feelings of elitism and entitlement makes it so he can't ever perform what he considers to be a demeaning act, even if it means his survival.

Mustafa on the other hand has adapted to life on the island. He doesn't let his newfound sense of freedom go to his head. He's willing to work with both the expedition and the Indians in order to survive. The theme of Freedom is demonstrated in this chapter in that Mustafa has a greater sense of it, and he feels as if he is free to choose the best way to survive. He also enjoys a freedom from the oppression that he'd earlier experienced. In contrast to his masters, Mustafa shows his intelligence by trying to learn the Indian language as well as their customs, something which proves essential for their survival. Cabeza de Vaca has learned to shed his elitist mentality. He fully embraces the Indian lifestyle and has even started a new life with them.

Discussion Question 1

What was the fate of those that left because they didn't want to work with the Indians?

Discussion Question 2

What did their survival depend upon during the winter?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mustafa consider himself to be almost a free man now?

Vocabulary

absolved, elucidate, meted, dejected, prudently, rapacious, benefactors, victuals



Chapter 13

Summary

The expedition discovers a few other members that have been separated from the rest when they sailed with the governor. The survivors report similar stories to what happened to the expedition on the island. They report that they lost most of their members to sickness and hunger. Another reports that one of the groups had also resorted to cannibalism. Father Anselmo is so discouraged by what he hears that he decides to abandon the expedition. This hurts the remaining members of the expedition, with Diego especially taking the loss very hard. Morale is once again low, and only continues to drop as several more members end up passing away from sickness. The expedition has stopped giving names to the locations they discover, which Mustafa takes as a sign of humility. The group debates whether or not to bury the fallen, but ultimately decide that they don't have time for it. The survivors continue to press on, hoping that they will be able to reach Pánuco.

Analysis

Father Anselmo can't bear to see how far the Castilians have fallen. He abandons his own people to live with the Indians because he has recognized they aren't as savage as the Castilians made them out to be, and that the Castilians are the ones who have become savages. Diego takes the loss hard, especially since he seems to share the same views as Father Anselmo. The expedition begins to shed their elitist mentality when they stop naming the locations. This tradition continues for most of the book until they regain some of their power. Once they do, Dorantes starts renaming the land, acting as though they have some sort of divine right to the land.

Discussion Question 1

What is Father Anselmo's reaction to the survivors who were left on the Island?

Discussion Question 2

In the end, which group does Father Anselmo and Diego decide to live with, and why?

Discussion Question 3

What does Mustafa think signifies a humble nature by the Castilians?

Vocabulary

brazen, rueful, fretful, slovenly, even-handed, morality



Chapter 14

Summary

The remaining members of the expedition stumble across a small Indian tribe. Señor Dorantes trades his last possession he had been hiding, a gold earring he acquired when he bought Mustafa. The group was planning on leaving the next day, but they were so hungry that they decided to stay. The tribe puts them to work. The tribe is very strict and aren't afraid to beat the expedition members if they disobey. One of the survivors, León, admits to being one of the men that took advantage of the Indian women prisoners much earlier in the expedition. Mustafa angrily attacks the man, but the rest of the expedition separates them. When the expedition is accused of stealing from the tribe, León blames Mustafa. Mustafa is beaten by the tribe, but left alive.

Mustafa later proves that it was León who was stealing the food. Instead of beating him, they simply execute him. Three more members meet a similar fate when they go into forbidden territory. Shortly after, Diego is killed as well because one of the Indians have a vision of Diego going after their child. This devastates Señor Dorantes. All that is left of the expedition is Mustafa, Señor Dorantes, and Castillo. One morning, Señor Dorantes runs off. Mustafa believes he left because he couldn't handle the loss of his brother and the fact that he gave Castillo so much affection. Mustafa and Castillo agree that next week they will sneak away as well so they can try and find Señor Dorantes and get away from the cruel Indian tribe. At the end of the chapter, Castillo thanks Mustafa for everything that he has done.

Analysis

Both León and Dorantes continue to show off their greed in this chapter. Greed, as a theme, is demonstrated heavily when Dorantes hides his gold earring even though there were times where it would have been useful to barter it. At this point, they have traded all of their old possessions just to get supplies to survive, even their tools. The earring had no use outside of monetary value. León cares only about his own interests. He and Dorantes still act superior to the Indian tribe, even though they're relying solely on them for survival. When Dorantes starts to feud with Mustafa he blames him for theft, something that gets Mustafa beaten and could even get him killed.

For once, the Indians are the ones acting superior to the survivors. The survivors are quickly reduced to nothing but servants, a role that Mustafa is familiar with. Many of the remaining members are killed off by the Indian tribe, including Diego who hadn't even committed any crimes. Dorantes takes the loss very hard, likely realizing how little affection he had been showing for his brother during the expedition. Dorantes runs away, which demonstrates two themes. First, there is the Learning from Past Mistakes, which he clearly isn't. Others have attempted to run away before and the Indians caught them and killed them. Secondly, his greed is still fully intact. He should know that he



was putting Mustafa and Castillo's life at risk given the way the tribe had acted before. There was also no reason that he couldn't have asked the other two to come with him. He's also heard plenty of stories from the other survivors about how leaving the group has ended poorly for them, but he still goes anyway.

Discussion Question 1

Compare the way the Indians are acting to the way the Castellians are acting.

Discussion Question 2

Why is Mustafa able to survive despite being a servant to the Indians now?

Discussion Question 3

Which character seems to represent the theme of Greed the most?

Vocabulary

indolence, intimidating, bauble, retort, avidly, menial, vindication, rebuffed



Chapter 15

Summary

Mustafa and Castillo are able to meet up with Dorantes. He has joined another tribe, but he is unhappy there because they still make him work. Mustafa makes friends with a healer, Chaubekwan. He and Castillo are accepted into the tribe and don't mind the work. Mustafa actually finds himself enjoying the time with the tribe. He takes many moments to enjoy the beautiful scenery. Dorantes eventually runs away to join another tribe, but Castillo doesn't go with him, choosing to stay with Mustafa. They eventually run into Dorantes again, who has joined another tribe. He's still worked hard, but he finds it more tolerable. During this time, Castillo and Mustafa became very close and friendly with one another.

The three are reunited with Señor Cabeza de Vaca. He explains how he lost his wife and child to the same disease that had previously crippled the expedition. He ends up joining the same tribe as Dorantes. Roughly a year later, Dorantes and Señor Cabeza de Vaca meet up with Mustafa and Castillo again. They talk about how things have gotten worse with their tribe and they're going to be forced to run again. To make matters worse, Castilians are becoming hated by many of the tribes because they have been invading and enslaving the Indians. The group decides to once again try and travel together and reach Pánuco.

Analysis

Despite everything they have gone through, Dorantes still feels superior to the Indians and doesn't believe he should have to do any sort of physical labor in order to get the food and supplies they give him. He doesn't even acknowledge the fact that the Indians don't have to help him at all. Mustafa on the other hand is enjoying his time with the Indians. He doesn't mind doing work for them because he feels like he is doing it as an equal. They aren't forcing him to work like the Castilians were, but they're instead treating it like a job. Dorantes continues to ignore his past experiences and he decides to run off to another tribe, mistakenly believing that he will just stumble upon a tribe that doesn't make him work for anything. Castillo has learned from his experiences and he stays with Mustafa, happy to be in a tribe that treats them well and gives them the opportunity to get supplies. Dorantes does eventually find a tribe that requires him to do a little less work, but he at least seems to learn to accept what he has.

Cabeza de Vaca is introduced to the survivors again, bringing the total numbers of survivors up to four. The Castilians in the area are still trying to enslave Indians, showing they haven't learned from their previous expeditions. They keep trying to act superior to the Indians, as though they have a divine right to their land. Both sides end up suffering losses, and the Castilians just end up capturing useless land. Dorantes lets his greed get the better of him again and he convinces everyone to run away yet again.



Just like the governor, he believes that they can reach Pánuco despite having had no luck finding it for several years. What the author is suggesting, here, then, is the theme of Learning from the Past, and that in the same types of circumstances only the foolish continue to do the same things that inevitably end in tragedy.

Discussion Question 1

Compare Dorantes to Castillo.

Discussion Question 2

How is the Castillian world view crippling their ability to survive on this land?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Greed as exemplified in this chapter.

Vocabulary

attire, deference, grievance, arduous, concoctions, sanctioned, poultices, mundane



Chapter 16

Summary

The group knows they can't survive without the help of another tribe. After a few days of wandering through the wilderness, they run across another tribe, the Avavares. Mustafa earns a reputation for the group thanks to his basic healing abilities. Soon, all four of them are using simple healing techniques they've learned from their respective backgrounds. Within a year they are not only accepted as part of the tribe, but they no longer have to do the mundane tasks that Dorantes used to complain about. They are even offered up brides. Señor Cabeza de Vaca denies a bride as he is still torn up about his lost wife. The other three accept, and Mustafa marries a fiery girl, Oyomasot, whom he had fallen in love with. Mustafa feels like not only has he been set free from his life of slavery, but he is finally no longer alone.

Analysis

Several themes are examined in this chapter. First, there is clear evidence that this smaller group have finally Learned From the Past and have adjusted their world views towards the indigenous peoples. The group shows that they have at least learned some things from their experiences. They seek out a tribe because they know that on their own they can only last a few days. Mustafa continues to shine when he takes on the role of a healer, using techniques from his homeland to help treat basic ailments. The others soon join him, giving them prominent positions in the tribe. Mustafa has learned from his past and doesn't let the greed go to his head.

Secondly, the theme of Freedom is demonstrated in this chapter. Meaningful and useful work has set Mustafa free. He no longer feels that he is subservient to others, and he has a real position that commands respect and honor. He's happy to no longer be a slave and to have finally found a wife that he truly loves.

Lastly, Mustafa has learned that societies need to work together in order to be successful, which demonstrates the theme of Cooperation/Working Together. Everyone has presented their different knowledge and techniques from their respective homelands and, as a result, they are able to treat previously untreatable ailments. Their diversity is their strength.

Discussion Question 1

What makes the survivors valuable to the natives?



Discussion Question 2

What has Mustafa realized about freedom?

Discussion Question 3

How have the small band of survivors changed from the beginning of the story?

Vocabulary

fluent, vassal, interloper, gluttonously, infusion, morose, unadorned, vocation



Chapter 17

Summary

Mustafa and the others are called off to help another tribe. Mustafa initially doesn't want to go, but everyone convinces him it is a good idea. They treat that tribe and end up getting recommended to visit another tribe. The others speak to Mustafa and convince him this should be how they live their lives. They are always greeted well by the tribes, and this way they can avoid having to fall back into doing mundane work when their healing services are no longer needed. Mustafa ends up agreeing, and they continue to go from tribe to tribe for the next two years, being given the name Children of the Sun. They start to gather a following, numbering nearly 1,200 in number. Each time they are given lavish and extravagant gifts. Mustafa worries that they're becoming too big and famous.

Eventually, they won't be able to treat someone and everything will crumble around them, he fears. Nobody else seems to share Mustafa's fear. After healing their most recent tribe, Dorantes gives the village a new name, something that Mustafa notes they haven't done in years.

Analysis

The group is starting to become enamored with their recent success, letting the power and wealth go to their heads. Mustafa tries to point this out, but they dismiss his warnings. In their minds, they're getting what they want so they don't have any reason to show any caution. They're forgetting the lessons that they previously learned. Dorantes is once again letting his superiority show when he decides to give the village a new name, as though it were his right. Mustafa's repeated warnings foreshadow that something bad is about to happen in the following chapters.

Discussion Question 1

Why is this way of life that the survivors have adopted not sustainable?

Discussion Question 2

Why would Mustafa have reservations about the way everyone is acting?

Discussion Question 3

What indicates that Mustafa has learned from the past and does not want to repeat it?

Vocabulary

emissary, canopy, extravagant, lavish, eulogizer, usher, idiosyncrasies



Chapter 18

Summary

Mustafa finds a piece of glass that he recognizes as belonging to the Castilians. The group finds tracks that lead them to a Castilian camp, where they are informed eight years have passed since their initial expedition. They tell their story and are welcomed back, but the Castilians are interested in the Indians that follow the group. This worries Mustafa and the others, who recognize that the Indians are seen as little more than slaves. They try to get warnings out, but the soldiers make it difficult for them to get private moments with the Indians.

The Indians they are able to tell disagree and faithfully continue to follow the Children of the Light. They go to the camp and meet the mayor, Melchor Díaz. Señor Cabeza de Vaca tries to use his old position to argue for letting the Indians go. The mayor denies the request and insists that it is illegal to keep Indian slaves. Despite that claim, the Indians are kept under surveillance and not allowed to leave. They are clearly being treated worse than the Castilians. Mustafa sends his wife to spread warnings throughout the camp, but the Indians are still putting their faith in the Children of the Light. The group puts together their wealth to try and buy them, but the Castilians insist that cannot be done because the Indians aren't slaves, so they can't be bought. The chapter ends with the group being called away to meet the governor of Nueva Galicia.

Analysis

The survivors show that they do genuinely care about the Indians in their care. They do their best to try and argue to let the Indians go, but the Castilians want to imprison them anyway. The Indians ignore the warnings because they are convinced they should follow the Children of the Light.

So, the reader sees that things have come full circle. Refusing to learn from past mistakes, the survivors became drunk with power and elevated themselves above basic healers. Although they weren't trying to act superior, they ended up in that position, reducing the Indians to mere followers. Their intentions were good, but this attitude is what got the Indians captured. The survivors are brought back into the Castilian lifestyle, which starts to change all of the members, with the exception of Mustafa.

Mustafa is the voice of reality, and though it seems that the other survivors hear what he is saying, they are not willing to go against their own culture and their world view. It is known and comfortable to them, even if it now bothers their conscience. Their sense of morality has shifted and this is what causes the internal conflict. Mustafa isn't affected as much because his internal sense of ethics and morality were already at a different place. This is why he is able to see what is happening with a clearer head. And it is why he tries to warn them all.



Discussion Question 1

What worries Mustafa the most about the situation they find themselves in?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Mustafa have a unique perspective from the other survivors?

Discussion Question 3

How do the survivors act initially when those in the Castillian village are interested in the Indians?

Vocabulary

inexorable, affectation, decorum, mandate, efficacy, inordinate, superfluous



Chapter 19

Summary

The group is brought to meet the governor of Nueva Galicia, Guzmán. The rest of the Indians are left behind at the encampment. The Indian family members of the expedition's members are given low quality quarters to stay in while everyone else is treated well. All non-Indians are given the opportunity to clean themselves up and get proper attire.

Guzmán asks the group about the Indians in the area and wants them to draw a map. Recognizing that the Indians are in danger, the group tries to convince him that the Indians are peaceful and just want to be left alone. Guzmán ignores those pleas and insists that the Indians are wild savages. Mustafa and the others feign ignorance and refuse to draw a map. Dorantes's brother in law, Satosol, agrees to be a guide to Guzmán, even against everyone's warning. Dorantes promises Mustafa that once they reach Mexico, he will find a notary to give Mustafa his freedom.

Analysis

The Castilians start to bring the group back into their society. This is bad for Mustafa and the others with their new wives, since they aren't seen as equals in the eyes of the Castilians. The Castilians repeatedly try to get the group to betray the Indians, but they refuse to give up information. The Castilians claim they just want to help the Indians, but the group realizes those claims are false.

Even though they aren't specifically using the term slavery, it's clear that they only want the Indians to do labor for them and help them find treasures. Many of the Castilians still outright believe the Indians to be savages. Dorantes promises to let Mustafa go, but as Mustafa finds out, he has no intention of following through with that promise. Dorantes is simply too greedy and just sees Mustafa as a useful resource. It is interesting to note that many times when it seems that a life lesson has been learned, when placed back in the same circumstances, Dorantes and the others revert back to their old ways. Mustafa, and the reader, are confounded by this. Their refusal to learn from past mistakes dooms them all to suffer the same ill fate that they suffered before.

Again, the theme of Prejudice and Elitism is examined in this chapter. The wives and families of the survivors are treated as animals while the survivors are given the better clothing and food. The survivor's arguments fall on deaf ears as Guzman refuses to consider changing his perspective on anyone outside of his cultural experience. To him, anyone who is not Catholic or Spanish, is subhuman and thus, rightfully to be treated as slaves. The fact that he justifies this as a 'help' to the 'savages' illustrates this mindset.



Discussion Question 1

What is Guzman's attitude toward the Indians?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Dorantes most likely tell Mustafa that when they get back to Mexico that he will free him?

Discussion Question 3

What justification does Guzman use for wanting to enslave the Indians?

Vocabulary

exacerbated, amiably, indolence, obliquely, tacit, anecdote, obdurate, lucre



Chapter 20

Summary

The group travels to the city of Tenochtitlán in Mexico. They are dressed in their old Indian clothing and are brought before a large gathering in the church led by Bishop Juan de Zumárraga. The Bishop shares their story with the congregation and praises them for being such good Christians. He wants others to follow in their footsteps and peacefully convert the Indians to Christianity.

The Indian wives are very uncomfortable in the city. Mustafa and Dorantes are worried they don't have enough money to sail back home. Mustafa asks about his freedom once again, and Dorantes assures him he will get it. He adds that he has been busy with his own problems, as his wife has gotten pregnant. He adds that she isn't technically even his wife anymore since they weren't married in a Christian church. Mustafa asks if they could properly remarry, but Dorantes just waves it off as being too complicated.

Analysis

The Bishop shows his greed, as well as his prejudice, although in a subtle fashion. He dresses the group up as Indians because he wants to use their appearance to manipulate the feelings of everyone else in attendance. He doesn't actually care about the survivors, but just about how he can use them to get his message across and further increase the offerings given by the congregation. The Castilians continue to show their superiority. They don't care about the Indian culture and want the wives to start adhering to their dress code and beliefs. This not only examples the theme of Prejudice, but also that of Greed.

The theme of Prejudice is offered, additionally, when Dorantes abandons whatever loyalty he had to the group. He refuses to acknowledge that the Indian woman he married is his wife because it isn't done in a church. His prejudice keeps shining through when he refuses to get Mustafa his papers. Mustafa is once again his slave, something that benefits only Dorantes.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the Bishop want all of the survivors to dress in their Indian clothes?

Discussion Question 2

What happens to Dorantes once he's back in Mexico?



Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Prejudice as it is exemplified in this chapter.

Vocabulary

firmament, testimony, witnesses, acquired, vague, minuscule, lectern



Chapter 21

Summary

The group is brought before the viceroy of New Spain, Antonio de Mendoza. He expresses his desire to see the Indians enslaved and the land tamed. The Castilians in the group spend the next two months organizing their official report, which they know is just being used to make as detailed a map as possible. They don't speak of any of the crimes that they committed or how close they became with the Indians.

Cabeza de Vaca seems annoyed that they aren't getting rewarded in any way for all the work they've done. Dorantes is still worried about getting enough money to sail home, but Mustafa is confident that between all the treasures they've acquired from the Indians they will be able to get just enough to return home. The Indian women are being taught the ways of Christianity and made to dress like the Castilians. Mustafa asks about his papers, but Dorantes once again brushes the topic aside and promises to get them to Mustafa later.

Analysis

The survivors continue to show their loyalty to the Indians by not giving up their location. They use very vague terms in their report, so the Castilians really can't make much of a map out of what they learn. Despite that, the Castilians are still greedy and want to go after the Indians, even though there's little of value. Whenever they conquer the land, it ends up being useless because they don't have the Indians around to take care of it.

Instead of trying to work with the Indians like Mustafa and the others did, they just want to conquer because they believe themselves to be superior to the savages. This continues to demonstrate the theme of Prejudice, as well as Greed. As Mustafa has shown, they could all work together as one unified group, with all benefiting. The mindset of the Castilians is shown with the wives, who are being taught Christianity and are made to dress like the locals. Dorantes continues to show his greed by ignoring Mustafa's request for freedom.

The theme of Freedom is seen in this chapter as well. There are several ways in which freedom is restricted or taken away. First, there is the freedom of culture. The wives and the survivors, who have adopted some of the Indian's ways, are told to stop this at once. They are forced to adopt foreign ways of dressing, speaking, and acting. Secondly, Mustafa's freedom is seen as something that is just out of reach, held beyond arm's length by Dorantes, much like full citizenship is held just beyond reach of the Indian wives and family members.



Discussion Question 1

How are the Castellians attempting to assimilate the Indians?

Discussion Question 2

What is the most likely motive for the Castellians wanting a detailed report of the survivor's activities?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Freedom in this chapter.

Vocabulary

expedition, foresight, reticence, accused, unsightly, smitten, bedraggled, aghast



Chapter 22

Summary

Yet another banquet is held for the group so they can tell their stories. This time, it is hosted by the legendary Hernán Cortés. Dorantes admits to having financial troubles as he has started to gamble at the taverns. Cortés offers to buy Mustafa, but Dorantes refuses. Cabeza de Vaca ends up suddenly leaving after their report is done, but he promises to take letters for the rest of the expedition. He leaves on very good terms with everyone, and it's clear that they will miss one another after everything they have been through.

Mustafa once again presses Dorantes about his papers, but Dorantes pushes the subject aside and remarks that Mustafa should be grateful for how well he has been treated given his position. Mustafa feels like he has fallen back into slavery. Even worse, he has brought his wife into slavery as well.

Analysis

Cabeza de Vaca shows that he has learned something from his time with the expedition. He recognizes that the Castilians are setting themselves up for failure so he decides to leave so he can do something less disastrous with his life. Dorantes acts the opposite. He starts to gamble away their money and clearly has no intention of letting Mustafa go, even after everything they've been through together. He doesn't sell Mustafa, but he's likely only doing that because he wants to have Mustafa around to serve him. He has little need for the money since he's being put up in an estate. Mustafa is devastated because he realizes that he and his wife have once again become slaves since the Castilians view them both as inferior.

In many ways deVaca has secured his own freedom by walking away from the disastrous circumstances that are beginning to build. Mustafa would like to do the same thing but he is bound to Dorantes as a slave. By illustrating and comparing deVaca to Dorantes, the author is showing the reader that change is possible, even when one starts out with a prejudiced mindset. In other words, prejudice is a choice. Secondly, it is clear that Mustafa feels personal responsibility for bringing his wife and family into a situation that is worse than when they were in la Florida. He is frustrated because he is continually lied to and can't do anything about it.

Discussion Question 1

Compare deVaca to Dorantes.



Discussion Question 2

Discuss the theme of Prejudice as it is presented in this chapter.

Discussion Question 3

What is the author suggesting about class and the ability to change one's attitudes and perceptions?

Vocabulary

disposition, fortitude, missive, congratulatory, sallied, auspicious, comical, fortuitous



Chapter 23

Summary

Dorantes's wife gives birth, but the child ends up being sent away to a Christian convent. Both Dorantes and Castillo end up taking on new Spanish wives. The viceroy tries to convince Dorantes to go on another expedition because of his experience, but Dorantes refuses. After what happened last time, he doesn't want to go again. The viceroy tries to purchase Mustafa, but again Dorantes refuses. Castillo confesses to Mustafa that he's tried to ask why Dorantes won't sign the papers to grant his freedom, but Dorantes never tells him. Mustafa convinces Dorantes to let him go on the expedition so he can return with wealth for Dorantes. Dorantes agrees, his greed getting the better of him.

Analysis

Dorantes has embraced the Castilian lifestyle once again. The theme of Prejudice is illustrated in this chapter when he dismisses his child and sends it to a convent. He once again starts to only care about money, demonstrating the theme of Greed. Mustafa uses this to his advantage. He's learned how to manipulate Dorantes and knows that he can use that greed to gain his freedom.

Dorantes would never want to go on an expedition again, but he would happily send Mustafa in his place. This is likely one of the reasons why Dorantes hasn't agreed to sell Mustafa. He knows that he can gain additional income by keeping him as a slave since he can essentially rent Mustafa out for expeditions. Castillo shows his loyalty to Mustafa by trying to get Dorantes to set him free. It's clear that he's learned from their experiences and no longer considers himself to be superior to Mustafa or the Indians.

This parallel between Castillo and Dorantes is significant because it indicates that people can change regardless of their initial station in life. The author does seem to suggest that it is easier for someone who has nothing to shift their allegiances, than those who have more to lose by adopting a new paradigm.

Discussion Question 1

How does Mustafa manipulate Dorantes?

Discussion Question 2

Most likely, what does Mustafa plan to do once he starts on this expedition?



Discussion Question 3

What action indicates that Dorantes has gone back to his old way of thinking and living?

Vocabulary

swaddled, equanimity, convivial, magnanimous, drunkard, cowardice, avarice, plentitude



Chapter 24

Summary

Mustafa and his wife set out with a new expedition. They return to many of the places they had previously been. Areas that were once bustling with life have become abandoned. One of the new governors, Coronado, stops a group of slavers that had been harassing the Indians. During the initial journey, Mustafa's wife becomes pregnant, which makes the both of them ecstatic. Mustafa tricks the expedition into letting him advance ahead of the group, to act as a diplomat to the Indians. He says this will pacify the more violent ones and make them more receptive to Christian preaching, plus it will help him learn more about the fabled seven cities they are looking for. Each time, he sends messages back saying that the land ahead decreases in value. The expedition is a failure and Mustafa finally has the chance to gain his freedom.

Analysis

Mustafa observes how barren the land has become because of the repeated Castilian expeditions. They haven't been able to learn their lesson. The invading Castillians are likened to a virus, that has come into the area, depleted the area's resources, and then left it to die with little regard to the inhabitants or the environment.

Each expedition just pushes the Indians away, and without them the Castilians aren't able to tend to the land and make it flourish. Since the Castillians aren't willing to acknowledge that the Indian's knowledge of the area is vastly superior to their own, they are not able to utilize the lands that they have conquered. Thus, their prejudice has made the land unusable for anyone.

The Castilians are still convinced that they can find gold in the area, not having learned from Mustafa's failed expedition that there aren't cities that are just filled with gold. Mustafa continues to outwit the Castilians. He does everything he can to discourage them from going on, convincing them that there's nothing but danger ahead and little in the way of treasure. It is interesting to note that Mustafa no longer considers himself anything but Indian, now. He has fully rejected the Castillians, and does not want to return to Morocco, either.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Mustafa continue to feed false reports back to the expedition leaders?

Discussion Question 2

With which group does Mustafa most closely identify?



Discussion Question 3

Why do the Castellians continue to forge ahead even with the bad reports from Mustafa?

Vocabulary

forge, plunder, fallow, barren, devoid, devastation, retribution, attribute



Chapter 25

Summary

Mustafa and his wife arrive in the town of Hawikuh, presumably acting as advance scouts for the Castilians. They warn the chief about the approaching white men and the dangers they pose. Mustafa wants them to spin a tale about how he, Mustafa, has been killed. His hope is that the dangerous lands won't seem worthwhile to the expedition, especially since he has been reporting that there is no gold to be found. Either way, he and his wife will leave the town the next day to start their lives. Mustafa wants stories to share with his son, so he decides to write a true account of everything that happened in his life.

The Indian chief, however, has had his ego and pride bruised by Mustafa's declarations and protests that he can defend his villages against the invaders. The book ends at this point, so the reader is left wondering what happened. However, the reader can assume that Mustafa and his wife did make it out of the village alive since the book, his journal, was written.

Analysis

Mustafa wants to create a true story about everything that happened on the expedition. He's learned how important it is to learn from stories and history because he's seen the Castilians constantly make the same mistakes over and over again. His plan only works because of how greedy the Castilians are. They want to obtain treasure without having to do any work, because they consider manual labor to be beneath them. They're perfectly willing to let their servants work so they can reap the rewards. Because they take this approach, Mustafa is able to send back whatever information he wants.

While Mustafa has learned from history, the same can't be said for the Indian chief. He's convinced that he'll be able to fight off the Castilians, despite the fact that many Indians have already been wiped out by the Castilians. He ignores Mustafa's warnings and potentially dooms his tribe if the Castilians do ever decide to head north, which they likely will since they are convinced there's gold up there.

Discussion Question 1

Why doesn't the Indian chief take Mustafa's advice?

Discussion Question 2

What evidence suggests that Mustafa and his wife make it out of the Indian village and gain their freedom?



Discussion Question 3

What is the author saying about the power of greed?

Vocabulary

apoplectic, enraged, battlements, weaponry, revolutionary, rebellious, fastidious



Characters

Mustafa ibn Muhammad

Mustafa is the main character of the book. He's a Moor that is forced to sell himself into slavery in order to take care of his family. Before that, Mustafa had been a successful merchant. When his city came under siege many lost their jobs, including Mustafa. Mustafa feels it was his greed as a merchant that led to him being forced to sell himself into slavery, since he had gotten so greedy he had sold slaves of his own. Mustafa cares greatly about his family and constantly thinks back to them and wishes for the freedom to return to his home.

As a slave, Mustafa is very quiet and obedient. As things continue to get worse for the expedition he comes into his own. Everyone becomes an equal in his eyes and he steps up to learn more about the Indians and negotiate between the tribes to get supplies. He takes well to the Indian lifestyle and even begins to find their land beautiful. He truly loves his new wife, and comes to respect his remaining companions as well.

Mustafa is very clever and an excellent judge of character. Unlike some of the other members of the expedition, he feels bad whenever they have to raid a village for supplies. He does his best to try and avoid fighting, and when he is forced to defend himself he still feels bad for whatever damage he has to inflict on his opponents. Mustafa is often the voice of reason amongst the group, pointing out whenever they are doing something unwise that might get them in trouble.

Señor Dorantes

Dorantes is a Castilian merchant who purchases Mustafa and renames him Estebanico. Dorantes is a selfish man who cares only for his own wealth and reputation. He is very jealous and frequently finds himself competing with other members of the expedition. Dorantes considers mundane work beneath him and always complains whenever the Indians ask him to do manual labor in exchange for all the food and help they offer. Dorantes shows his greed when he refuses to let Mustafa go, even after promising his freedom several times. Dorantes shows some sympathy when his brother is killed, but this kindness doesn't extend to his daughter or his Indian wife.

Don Pánfilo Narváez

Narváez is the governor and leader of the expedition. He is a self-assured leader who gives the illusion of listening to his captains, but ultimately does whatever he wishes. Narváez is consumed with the idea of finding more gold for the kingdom. He leads his expedition to disaster. He is a very immoral leader who will happily resort to torture whenever needed, and he does nothing to stop his men when they take advantage of



their prisoners. When his troops start to desert him he became increasingly withdrawn and eventually gives up on the expedition, abandoning them to the strong waters.

Diego Dorantes

Diego is the much younger brother to Mustafa's master. Unlike his brother, he is much kinder and becomes genuine friends with Mustafa. When Mustafa goes to speak with the Indian tribes, Diego offers to go with him. He's eventually killed by the Indians when one of them has a vision about him.

Señor Castillo

Castillo is another one of the younger members of the expedition. He is very close to Dorantes, who treats him like a brother. Castillo is one of the more outspoken members of the expedition, constantly pointing out to the governor that they should be turning back and trying to get help instead of pressing on for supplies. Like Diego, he shows a softer side towards Mustafa. He ends up being one of Mustafa's closest friends and pushes for Dorantes to set him free.

Señor Cabeza de Vaca

Cabeza de Vaca is originally a rival to Mustafa's master. He is the treasurer of the expedition, which is a very coveted position. He eventually ends up taking an Indian wife and refuses to go with the survivors. They later meet up with him some time later after most of his tribe, including his wife and child, were wiped out by disease. He stays with the group up until the very end where he eventually returns to his home. Like Dorantes, he is very competitive.

Heniya

Heniya is Mustafa's mother. She cares a great deal for her family and is always trying to teach them through her different stories. She initially warns Mustafa about his greed, but he doesn't listen which is why he believes he ended up in slavery.

Muhammad

Muhammad is Mustafa's father. He is a very unlucky man who decided to become a scholar because he wasn't suited for physical labor. He loses his arm standing up to the Portuguese when they try to take his spot on barge that he needs for his pregnant wife. He pushes his son to become a notary, but Mustafa becomes a merchant instead. Muhammad is hurt by this. He gets sick and is unable to support his family. He eventually passes away, which causes the family to fall apart.



Father Anselmo

Anselmo is one of the priests that went along with the expedition. He remains with them up until the Isle of Misfortune. He is one of the kinder members of the expeditions and helps to take care of each of the members. Everyone generally likes him, which is why he's put in charge of rationing. Anselmo loses faith in the expedition when he hears about some of the men resorting to cannibalism. He decides to stay with one of the Indian tribes.

Bernardo Rodriguez

Rodriguez is a merchant who initially purchases Mustafa. He is a very selfish and greedy man who ends up with a severe gambling problem. He is inexperienced with owning a slave, so he shifts between kind and cruel. He constantly fights with his wife, which causes him to take advantage of his other slave, Ramatullai.

Ramatullai

Ramatullai is the other slave owned by Rodriguez. She becomes friends with Mustafa and the two are shown to have some romantic feelings for one another. She is a mother of two daughters who she desperately wants to reconnect with, as she doesn't know what happened to them after she was sold into slavery.

León

León is one of the survivors of the expedition. He admits to being one of the men who took advantage of the Indian prisoners, which causes Mustafa to attack him. In return, he tries to trick the Indians into thinking Mustafa was stealing food. He's eventually found guilty of theft and is murdered by the tribal chief.

Oyomasot

Oyomasot is a young Indian woman who ends up marrying Mustafa. She has a very tomboyish attitude in the tribe and constantly tries to do roles outside of her gender, like going hunting. While she's stubborn, she's also very intelligent and knows when to keep her temper in check. She helps Mustafa come up with a plan that eventually leads to their freedom.

Melchor Díaz

Melchor Díaz is the mayor that the survivors find many years after the expedition has fallen apart. He tries to get the group to give him details about the land so he can find more Indians, but the group refuses.

Antonio de Mendoza

Antonio de Mendoza is the viceroy of New Spain. He wants to pacify the Indians and convert them to Christianity. He treats the Castilian members of the group with respect and does everything he can to get information out of them. He ends up convincing Dorantes to send Mustafa on an expedition north to once again try and find Indian gold.



Symbols and Symbolism

Beards

The Castilians grow out their beards because they believe it makes them superior to the Indians, who are all clean shaven. The beards later come to represent the outsider status for the survivors of the expedition. The Indians consistently spot the survivors because of their unique beards.

Gold

Gold is representative of the greed that the Castilian adventurers have and a great symbol of wealth to them. They are willing to do anything in order to get even a few gold trinkets. This leads to them trying to conquer the Indian capital, even when they start to run out of supplies and get hunted by the Indians.

Story of the Embroiderer and the Sultan

Mustafa's mother tells him this story when he is trying to figure out what he wants to do with his life. The point of the story is to point out that the embroiderer became selfish and ended up getting injured when the Sultan threw her out. Her greed caused her hands to get damaged, and she could no longer work. Mustafa didn't appreciate this lesson until much later, and to him the story is personally about his own greed that made him sell slaves, only for him to then end up becoming a slave himself.

Riding gloves

Early on in the expedition, Mustafa's master shares his spare riding gloves with Castillo. This represents the friendship he has for the man, but it also represents his apparent disdain for his brother, Diego. He gives away his spare gloves when Castillo's are damaged, but the whole trip Diego never even had gloves.

Food portions/quality

At the beginning of the book, the Castilians use the amount of food and the quality of the food as a way of determining superiority. The higher ranked officers get more food and better food. This ends up turning around later in the book to reflect the lesser status of the former officers. They end up getting meager and lower quality rations from the Indians when they are seen as little more than slaves. Once their status is returned as the Children of the Light, they begin to get more food, once again reinforcing their superior position.



River/Town names

At the start of the book, the Castilians begin to name every river and town they come across, not caring for whatever the original name is. This is another way that they exert their superiority, making it clear that the land belongs to them and not the Indians that were originally there. Once their expedition is shattered, they stop doing this practice. Mustafa's master picks this practice back up near the end of the book once the group has grown in power, representing the superiority he feels as well as the fact that the land should naturally belong to them.

Ramatullai's letter

When Mustafa is enslaved alongside Ramatullai he writes a letter for her that she tries to get to her daughter. The letter represents affection, but not just for Ramatullai and her daughter. For Mustafa, it is a way to directly show how much he cares about Ramatullai and what he is willing to do for her.

Kitchen closet

Mustafa is forced to live in a tiny closet located in the kitchen when he is first sold into slavery. This tiny space represents the oppression that he feels being forced into slavery, as well as asserting his new lower status.

Christian names

When Mustafa is sold into slavery, he has to go to a church where he's baptized and given a new name. To him, this reinforces his position as a slave as he has to give up everything that he formally was, including a name, and take on something that's more suiting to his new masters.

Shard of Glass

To Mustafa, the shard of glass represents regret. Whenever he thinks back to the shard of glass, he thinks about how if he never saw it, the group would have never ended up back in New Spain and Mustafa would have continued to live as a free man.



Settings

La Florida

La Florida is where the book starts off. The expedition initially arrives here to settle the land. They find gold in an abandoned village which sets them off to find more wealth.

Río Oscuro

The Río Oscuro is named by the expedition on their way to Apalache. They encounter and subsequently murder a group of Indians at the river.

Santa María

Santa María is another Indian village that the expedition finds on their way to Apalache and subsequently rename.

Apalache

Apalache is the village that the expedition is trying to find because they believe it to be filled with gold. When they arrive, they only find a small village that has nothing of value outside of basic provisions. The governor sets up a base of operations at the village until he ends up fighting a group of Indians that eventually force them to leave.

Azemmur

Azemmur is the hometown of Mustafa. It is eventually put under siege by the Portuguese which causes Mustafa to lose his job and ultimately sell himself into slavery. He constantly references the city on his journey and one day hopes to return.

Aute

Aute is a city on the coast where the expedition flees to after being attacked at Apalache. They are forced to flee the small town as the attacks continue and many of the expedition are starting to get sick.

Seville

Seville is the city where Mustafa is sold as a slave and where both of his masters live. As a slave, he spends most of his time working in his master's shop until he's sold for the expedition.



Pánuco

Pánuco is the city that the expedition tries to get to in order to resupply. The city takes on an almost legendary reputation to the men as they believe they will find salvation there, but they never actually reach the city.

Island of Misfortune

The island of misfortune is where the expedition ends up after they are abandoned by the governor. The survivors make their own home on the island and spend a great deal of time there. Mustafa starts to learn the native tongue from the Indians. Many of the survivors develop a sickness and pass away. The remaining soldiers choose to desert the group because they don't want anything to do with the Indians.

Compostela

Compostela is the village that the survivors find years later after wandering through the various tribes acting as healers. They find out what has happened in the eight years since they've started the expedition.

Tenochtitlán

This is the city in New Spain where the survivors spend most of their time once they are reunited with the Castilians. They are given their own estates while they spend the first few months giving a very detailed report of their adventure. A new expedition is formed here, which is when Mustafa and his wife are sent away and eventually get the chance to escape.



Themes and Motifs

Greed

The theme of greed being dangerous is shown repeatedly throughout the course of the book. At the very start of the book, the governor wants to find the village of Apalache because he believes it to be filled with gold and other valuable treasure. As they start to get closer to the village, they don't find any signs of valuables, but the governor keeps insisting on going forward, even when it means losing track of the supply ships. Once they do find Apalache, there is no treasure, but the governor still doesn't give up. Not only does he want to keep pressing forward, but he starts to torture the Indians for more information. When Indians return to the city, the governor would rather fight them than try to make peace because he doesn't want to give up his valuable prisoners.

The theme isn't just demonstrated with the governor. Mustafa learns the hard way how dangerous greed can be. As a merchant, all he cares about is making more money so he can buy more possessions. His desire for money becomes so great that he is even willing to sell men into slavery. Much later, Mustafa realizes that it was this greed that led to him becoming a slave himself, and he should have instead listened to his parents and become a notary.

León is another character that demonstrates how dangerous greed can be. He feels that he deserves more food, so he steals from the tribe they are staying with. When he's caught for his lies he is executed. His greed was dangerous for him, but it also hurt the survivors as well. After that, the remaining members of the expedition are treated poorly by the Indians because they have proven to be untrustworthy, leading to several other survivors getting killed until just a small handful are left.

Prejudice

This theme is first demonstrated early on in the book when the governor captures several of the Indians. The governor treats them as being lesser beings simply because they are different. They are taken prisoner even though it is the governor and his men that are the trespassers. Whenever the governor encounters Indians, he consistently treats them as lesser beings. Each time he does this, it just causes more trouble. Perhaps the worst crime committed by the governor is when he lets his men take advantage of the Indian prisoners. Mustafa and many others note how wrong and terrible this is. By treating the women like objects, the governor invokes the wrath of the other Indians which is what dooms the expedition.

Mustafa also shows this theme throughout the story. Even though he is treated like a slave by the rest of the expedition, Mustafa still decides to help them out. Without Mustafa, the expedition would have been doomed because they needed him to make peace with the other Indian tribes. Mustafa himself only knows this lesson because he



had previously treated humans like property. After being enslaved, he learned the hubris of his actions and was forced to face up to what he had done.

Dorantes demonstrates this theme when the survivors are trying to get help from the other tribes. Dorantes still considers himself to be better than the Indians so he doesn't want to do any physical labor. This angers many of the tribes that they are with, and if it weren't for Mustafa they would have likely been left without any supplies and would have never made it back to civilization.

Learning from the Past

This theme is first shown relatively early on in the book. When the expedition first arrives in Apalache they are expecting to find a city filled with gold. Instead, all they find is a small village. The governor refuses to give up and learn from his mistakes. He insists that they are just in the wrong location because the area is also called Apalache, so the guides were just confused. He continues to lead the expedition, guiding them further from supplies and deeper into enemy territory. They are attacked for treating the Indians cruelly and the expedition ultimately falls apart.

At the very end of the book, the Castilians are trying to organize another expedition because they are interested in a legendary location known as the seven cities. They want to find this location because it is supposedly filled with gold. Even after hearing all the stories from the failed expedition, the Castilians are still convinced that the Indians are hiding riches from them and are willing to send more of their men out to try and find something that simply doesn't exist.

Mustafa also demonstrates this theme through his family. His mother is always telling stories that have important lessons behind them. She tells Mustafa one such story about an embroiderer who is driven by her greed to sneak into a Sultan's palace. She disguises herself as a member of the band that is performing, but she's quickly found out since she can't play. The sultan throws her out and her hands are damaged so she can't work again. Mustafa fails to learn this lesson, so he decides to become a merchant. His parents tried to get him to become a notary, but he wanted the riches that came with being a merchant. As a result, he ends up losing his job when the city is under siege and has to sell himself into slavery because he has no other options to provide for his family.

Pride

The governor once again shows off this theme with the initial expedition. He knows that they aren't going to be able to find any gold, but he keeps insisting that the expedition continues because he's too proud to admit that he is mistaken. He keeps making promises about all of the treasure that everyone will find which fills them with dreams of glory. It's this mindset which dooms the expedition to failure and causes nearly all of them to perish.



Mustafa's previous master, Rodriquez also demonstrates this theme. Rodriquez is very successful as a merchant. When he gets his new wealth he starts to squander it. He becomes addicted to gambling where he starts to slowly lose his fortune. He keeps promising money that he doesn't have, which causes him to fall heavy into debt. The only way that he is able to escape from his debt is by selling Mustafa, who was responsible for his initial success since he was mostly running the business.

Mustafa also points out this theme much later in the book, after the survivors have been given the name Children of the Light. He argues that they are promising too much to the Indian tribes. Instead of being seen as people, they were treated like divine beings. The tribes refuse to abandon the survivors, even when they warn them about the Castilians taking them captive. As a result, the majority of the tribes continue to follow the survivors and end up getting captured and imprisoned and Mustafa himself ends up back in slavery.

Working Together

This theme is first demonstrated after the expedition is forced to build rafts and try to sail towards Pánuco. The water becomes rough and unsteady, but if the ships tied themselves together they would have been able to stay together and potentially weather the rough waters. Instead of doing that, the governor panics and declares that it is every ship for themselves. As the survivors later find out, this order led to the other crews getting scattered and decimated, with barely any of the crew surviving.

The few survivors demonstrate this theme when they crash land on the island of misfortune. The survivors have almost no supplies and are still suffering from fevers. Most of the survivors don't want to approach the Indians for help because they are afraid of them and consider them savages. Mustafa proves that they are stronger by working together and he strikes an alliance between the Indians and the survivors, which allows them to survive.

Mustafa sees this theme through the way that all of the Indian tribes works together. Even though they have different cultures and beliefs, they still trade amongst one another and work together as a whole, which allows them to survive. Unlike the Castilians they don't quarrel amongst each other or form rivalries. Mustafa also demonstrates this theme at the end of the book when he combines his medical knowledge along with what the survivors and the Indians know. Through working together, they are able to treat a number of medical conditions and make life better for all of the tribes in the area.

Styles

Point of View

The Moor's Account is told from the first person perspective of the main character, Mustafa. Mustafa narrates the book as though he were writing his memoir, which he reveals at the end of the book he wants to do because his journey has helped him recognize how important storytelling is. He wants his son to have something to read, but he also wants to create an accurate account of what happened on the expedition. Every so often, Mustafa will interject a comment from the present into the story, directly addressing the reader to either justify an action or explain why a time skip was taking place.

Language and Meaning

While written in English, the book uses a great deal of Spanish words along with Native American and Moroccan titles. Mustafa makes frequent references to Muslim phrases as well. Mustafa will rarely translate the phrases, which makes sense given the book is supposed to be his memoir. He does provide context clues, so the reader can understand exactly what each title means. Mustafa frequently shows his inexperience during the expedition with the words that he uses. For example, early on the expedition runs across alligators, but nobody refers to them as that since they've never met them before. Instead, Mustafa describes them as giant green scaly monsters.

Structure

At the very start of the book the story shifts every chapter between what's happening to the expedition and Mustafa's past. Towards the middle of the book this practice stops since Mustafa's story of being enslaved catches up to the start of the expedition. Because the book is written like Mustafa's memoirs he constantly jumps around in time. Since the expedition had little sense of the passage of time the skips forward are usually given at most a vague reference. Once they meet up with the Castilians again Mustafa is able to be more precise. Each chapter reflects a very specific part of the story, usually reflecting meeting a tribe or discovering a new city. They are all simply called "the story of..." which fits the memoir storytelling nature.



Quotes

I was reminded of the moment, many years earlier, when the flag of the Portuguese king was hoisted over the fortress tower in Azemmur. I had been only a young boy then, but I still lived with the humiliation of that day, for it had changed my family's fate, disrupted our lives, and cast me out of my home. Now, halfway across the world, the scene was repeating itself on a different stage, with different people. So I could not help feeling a sense of dread at what was yet to come.

-- Mustafa (Chapter 1 paragraph 31)

Importance: Mustafa is able to relate to the Indians throughout the story because his enslavement mirrors the situation that they are in when the Castilians invade. This is what lets the expedition survive though because unlike the others, he's able to communicate and form alliances with the different tribes they encounter.

As for me, my bondage had taught me to keep an impassive face, but in the mirror I noticed that my eyes betrayed my anxiety. I told myself that I had merely been curious about the kind of fishnets the Indians used. I had not been looking for gold. Yet the pebble I had found had caused these four men, men who had done me no harm, to be whipped. I had to pretend, like my master, not to hear the cries that had begun to emerge from the storehouse.

-- Mustafa (Chapter 1 paragraph 39)

Importance: Unlike many of the expedition members, Mustafa doesn't act with a sense of entitlement or superiority. He's very empathetic to the needs of everyone else around him which proves to be vital throughout the course of the book.

Silence taught me to observe. Silence made me invisible to those who speak. Year after year, I witnessed my father write contracts for other people, and I began to wonder what it would be like to be a rich merchant, instead of a simple recorder.

-- Mustafa (Chapter 2 paragraph 51)

Importance: This passage explains why Mustafa wants to become a merchant, which sets in motion a series of events that leads to his enslavement.

Perhaps this led them to think of me as a good man, a decent man. But these prisoners did not know, and I could not explain to them, that I had once traded in slaves. I had sent three men into a life of bondage, without pausing to consider my role in this evil. Now that I had become a slave myself, it shamed me that, even without meaning to, I still caused the suffering of others. It was my find—the pebble of gold—that had unleashed the violence of Señor Narváez upon them.

-- Mustafa (Chapter 3 paragraph 79)

Importance: This is the first time that Mustafa talks about having once traded in slaves. It also shows the guilt he feels over these past actions.



But my master had no nickname for me. A nickname is something you use to tease someone, whether out of spite or out of affection, whereas all the things he called me were said without a hint of humor or irony: El Moro, El Negro, El Arabe. On most days, he did not even call me anything. He did not need to—I was always right behind him.
-- Mustafa (Chapter 3 paragraph 98)

Importance: This passage clearly shows the relationship that Mustafa has with his master. It also highlights the general attitude of Dorantes.

My father spoke to me at length that day. He told me that I would do well to choose law or carpentry, that law was the labor of the mind and carpentry the labor of the hands, whereas trade was neither. He warned me that trade would open the door to greed and greed was an inconsiderate guest; it would bring its evil relations with it.
-- Mustafa (Chapter 4 paragraph 77)

Importance: Both of Mustafa's parents try to talk him out of becoming a merchant because they are worried about the dangers associated with such a greedy position. This covers one of the major themes of the book, which is how dangerous greed can be.

So long as I managed to sell at a higher price, it no longer mattered to me what it was I sold, whether glass or grain, wax or weapons, or even, I am ashamed to say, especially in consideration of my later fate—slaves.
-- Mustafa (Chapter 4 paragraph 79)

Importance: This once again highlights the fact that Mustafa sold slaves, but it also captures his greedy mindset which sets up his future downfall.

My father and my mother had both warned me about the danger of putting a price on everything, but I had not listened. Now, years later, I had convinced myself that, because I had been the first to find gold in La Florida, my life would be returned to me. But life should not be traded for gold—a simple lesson, which I had had to learn twice.
-- Mustafa (Chapter 7 paragraph 52)

Importance: Another one of the themes of the book is how important it is to learn from history and stories, as shown by this passage.

The governor closed the meeting by saying that he would hold another council in a day or two, once all the captains had had a chance to think about the plan. Yet early the next morning, when we were still eating the morning meal, the governor sent his page to inform all the captains that he had made his decision: we were to go to Aute. Once again, I marched behind my master into the unknown, led by a governor who, though he retained the use of one eye, was the blindest man I had ever met.
-- Mustafa (Chapter 7 paragraph 149)

Importance: The governor is responsible for the expedition failing because he never



learns from his mistakes and lets his greed guide him. This passage highlights how foolish he had been and sets into motion the final downfall of the expedition.

A memory, buried away in a corner of my mind, surfaced now: we were walking by the side of the Umm er-Rbi' River, returning home from a trip to the shrine, where we had given prayers for my father's health. Yahya had grown tired; he threw up his little hands, wanting me to carry him on my back. Right away, Yusuf proclaimed himself the more tired of the two. I lifted them both up and carried them home. I could still remember the weight of their bodies against mine. 'You will see them again someday,' Diego said.
-- Mustafa (Chapter 11 paragraph 57)

Importance: This passage is important because it shows the growing bond between the survivors of the expedition and represents one of the first times where Mustafa is treated as something more than just a slave to the expedition.

This was how I began to fashion a new life for myself in the Land of the Indians. When I had sold myself into bondage, or trudged behind Narváez in the wilderness, or embarked on that crude raft with patchy sails, my keenest desire had been to go back to my old life in Azemmur, where I could start my days with my mother's blessings and end them by contemplating the rustling river from the solid safety of our rooftop. Instead, I had been pushed further and further into a fate from which no escape or reprieve seemed possible. And so there came a moment when I stopped struggling, when I decided that I would cease making any more plans to return to the old days. I made up my mind to look upon the present as exactly what it was: it was all I had. To add to my sense that my curse had turned into a blessing, not only was I free—I was no longer alone.

-- Mustafa (Chapter 16 paragraph 99)

Importance: This passage marks a turning moment for Mustafa. He's no longer concerned with getting back to his past, but has instead forged a new future for himself, one that he was determined to enjoy now that he was no longer alone.

I still had one thing. My story. I had journeyed through the Land of the Indians and had witnessed many things that my companions had preferred to revise, embellish, or silence. What had been changed, perverted, or left out was the heart of our history, the part that could not be explained, but could only be told. I could tell it. I could right what had been made wrong. And so I began to write my account. For every lie I had heard about the imperial expedition that had brought me to the edge of the world, I would tell the truth.

-- Mustafa (Chapter 22 paragraph 62)

Importance: Over the last eight years, Mustafa has changed and become more than just a slave. He's determined to get his freedom and to spread the true story of the expedition so people can learn from the mistakes they made. He knows that no matter what happens to him, nobody will be able to take his story away from him.